This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

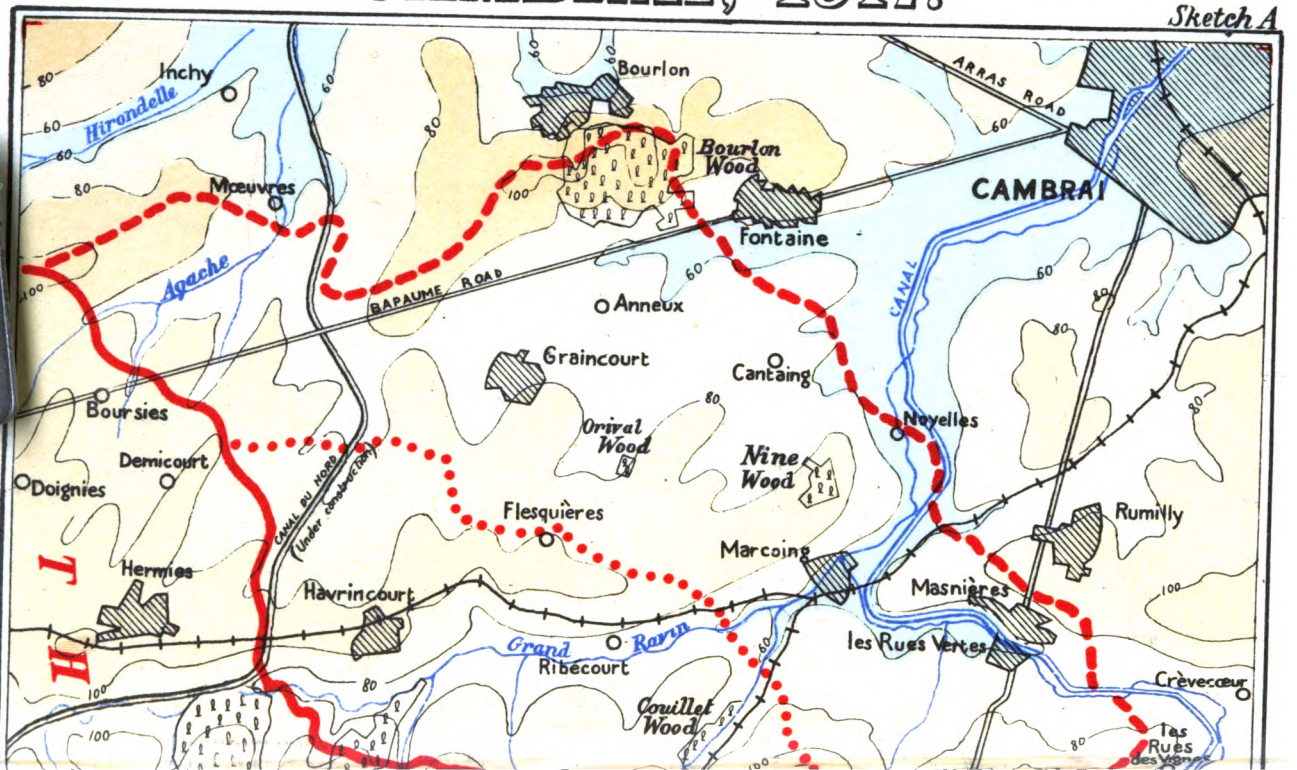
Google™ books

https://books.google.com

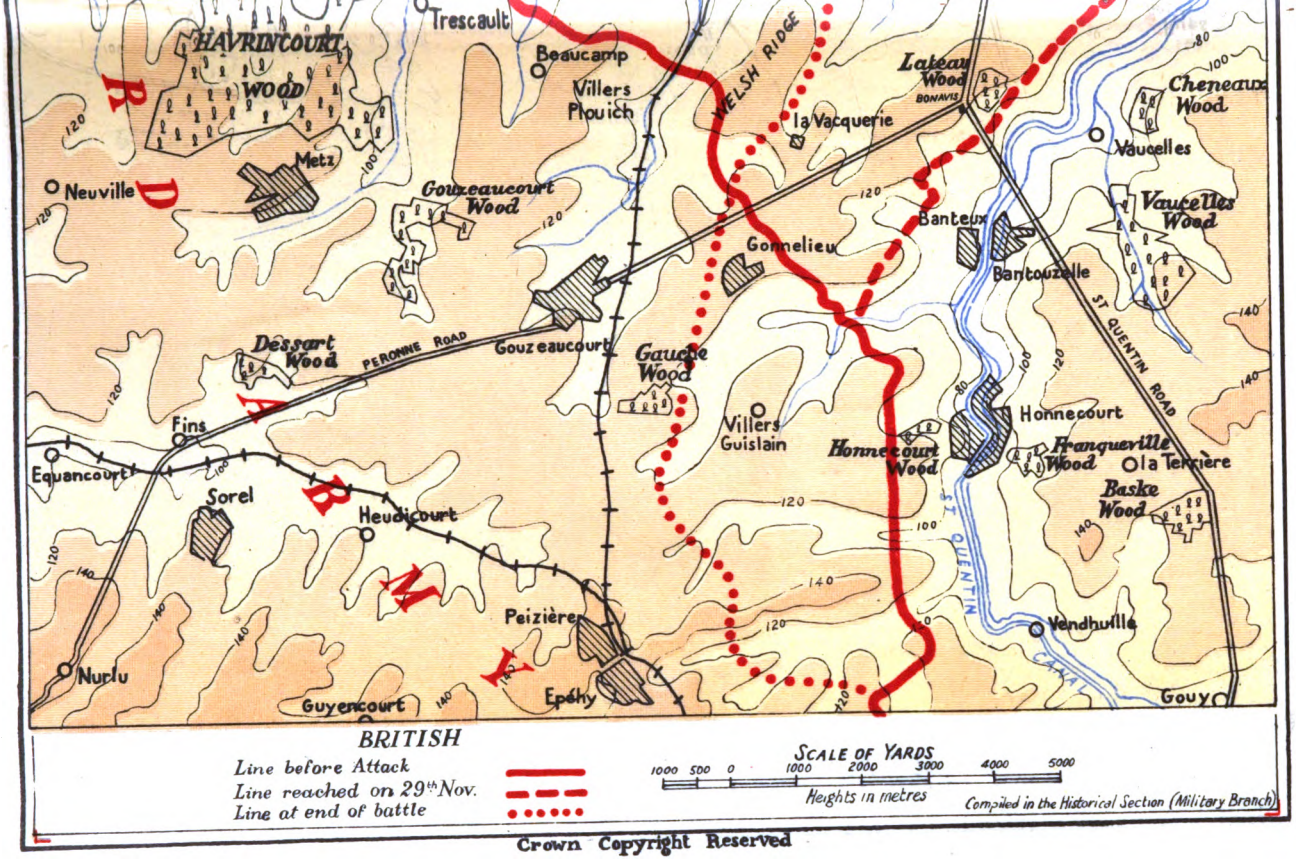
Digitized by Google

CAMBRAI, 1917.

Sketch A



Digitized by Google



Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google

The Library

of the

University of Wisconsin

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Frontispiece

23639

Digitized by Google

HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS
BY DIRECTION OF THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE
COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

MILITARY OPERATIONS FRANCE AND BELGIUM 1917

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

Compiled by
CAPTAIN WILFRID MILES
(*late* DURHAM LIGHT INFANTRY)

With a Preface by
BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR JAMES E. EDMONDS, C.B., C.M.G.
HON. D. LITT. (*Oxon.*) R.E. (*Retired*), *p.s.c.*†

LONDON: PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE
To be purchased directly from H.M. Stationery Office at the following addresses:
York House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2; 13a Castle Street, Edinburgh, 2;
39-41 King Street, Manchester, 2; 1 St. Andrew's Crescent, Cardiff;
Tower Lane, Bristol, 1; 80 Chichester Street, Belfast
OR THROUGH ANY BOOKSELLER
1948
Price £1 10*s.* 0*d.* net

Crown Copyright Reserved

1—23639

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

F081
.ED5
MILI
3

756590

NRB - WHP/SDA 1/27/78

PREFACE

The Battle of Cambrai, fought 20th November–7th December 1917, was the last considerable operation in which the British Armies in France were engaged during that year. It had little effect upon the general situation and, belonging neither to the Ypres operations generally known as " Passchendaele " which preceded it, nor to the great events which followed in 1918, is conveniently dealt with separately in one smaller self-contained volume in this series. The events and decisions of November and December 1917 which had their repercussion in the following spring are fully treated in " 1918 " Volume I.

That the volume is belated and appears after those concerned with 1918 is due to the reduction of the Staff of the Historical Section whose work on 1916–17 and on 1918 was proceeding simultaneously.

It will be seen that the idea of an offensive on the Cambrai front was one of several plans for subsidiary operations considered earlier in the year ; but its form and character, and the time at which it was delivered were determined by many factors. In the course of 1917 British resources on the Western Front were strained to the utmost for the common good, so that it was impossible to start the Cambrai offensive until the fighting at Ypres had been brought to a conclusion ; and it could hardly have been undertaken with any hope of success if mounted in the accepted fashion of the time.

The chief interest of this British offensive lies in the tactics employed : the secret concentration of the striking force, and the absolute reliance placed upon the unregistered shooting of the artillery and upon the ability of the tanks to force a passage for the infantry through the formidable wire of the Hindenburg defences. By these means complete surprise was achieved, and within a few hours a great success was won at little cost. The moral and material effect of the sudden bombardment and the combined action of tanks and infantry, trained together for the assault, realised the highest hopes.

Digitized by Google

The exploitation of the opportunity thus created presented difficulties which the Third Army proved unable to overcome. For this there were several reasons: the troops were not trained, organized or equipped to fight under conditions approximating to open warfare; the staffs, mostly composed of a younger generation, were versed only in the problems of sedentary trench warfare; there were no reserves of tanks to take up what might have been a pursuit; and the bulk of the cavalry which was meant to play the principal part in the pursuit did not succeed in coming into action at all.

It must be admitted that the failure of the cavalry at Cambrai is a reflection upon the plan of operations rather than upon the troops. Himself a cavalryman, the commander of the Third Army showed remarkably little appreciation of the conditions essential for successful cavalry action. Only by an advance upon a broad front are speed and freedom of movement possible to mounted troops; yet the British cavalry—after negotiating the narrow defiles which had been cleared for it through the captured Hindenburg defences—was confronted by the deep steep-sided St. Quentin canal where the passage was to be made at a very limited number of crossings. As these crossings were obstinately defended by the enemy the check was complete.

The only cavalry opportunity was that which seemed to beckon for a short time during the advance toward Bourlon, and here the lack of the "cavalry spirit" is apparent. It is by no means certain, however, that there was any place for bodies of horse on the battlefields of 1917: an eminent American said apropos of a French attempt which failed "You can't make a cavalry charge until you have captured "the enemy's last machine gun".

If all went well in the battle from the start the Commander-in-Chief had contemplated the rupture of the whole German front from the Sensée river to St. Quentin. Whether, in any circumstances, he possessed the resources—even with the addition of those the French were prepared to lend—to accomplish so much is another matter for doubt.

The measure of success which attended the German counter-stroke is easy to understand. When General Byng's Army had expended its offensive power and reverted to the

Digitized by Google

defensive it occupied a precarious position, particularly on the front beyond the St. Quentin canal and on the south-eastern face of the salient it had created. How precarious was not so well appreciated by the Army commander as it was by the enemy who was not slow to take advantage of conditions which so strongly favoured a surprise attack. Warnings of an imminent German offensive, sent by the front troops—though retaliation was to be expected—were apparently ignored at Third Army headquarters. No preparations had been made for such a contingency, with the result that the reserves available were ill-placed for dealing with a counter-offensive. Worse might have befallen but for the stubborn resistance of our troops who, as will be seen, fought the Germans to a standstill in the course of a few days.

Preliminary work on this volume was done by Viscount Sandon and, later, by Brigadier E. C. Anstey, who made considerable progress.

Many participants in the battle, to whom the draft chapters were circulated, gave welcome assistance by providing corrections, additions and suggestions. These commentators are far too numerous for all to be thanked individually; but the valuable help of Major-General M. N. MacLeod in explaining the evolution of "predicted" artillery fire must be mentioned.

The *Reichsarchiv*, later the *Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres* (German Historical Section), helped with the German side, notably by supplying operation orders, and reports from the higher formations. A copy of Volume XIII. of the German Official History, published in 1942, was received in time to be consulted.

The proofs of this volume have been subjected to the expert criticism of Mr. C. T. Atkinson and Major-General Sir Henry Thuillier.

All officers interested may not have seen the draft chapters. Suggested corrections and additions to the published work, will be gratefully received by the Historical Section, Cabinet Office, Great George Street, London, S.W.1.

J. E. E.

Digitized by Google

NOTES

THE location of troops and places is written from right to left of the British front, unless otherwise stated. Where roads which run through both the British and German lines are described by the names of towns or villages the place in British hands is mentioned first, thus " Bapaume—Cambrai road ".

To save space and bring the nomenclature in line with " Division ", " Infantry Brigade " has, in the text, been abbreviated to " Brigade " as distinguished from " Cavalry Brigade " and " Artillery Brigade " ; and the German " Regiment " similarly means " Infantry Regiment ". " Secunderabad Brigade ", " Ambala Brigade ", etc., are cavalry brigades, having no infantry equivalent.

Following the usual practice observed in this series of volumes the distinguishing numbers of Armies, corps and divisions, etc., are designated thus : Third Army, III. Corps, 6th Division, 2nd Cavalry Division, 16th Brigade, 2nd Cavalry Brigade, XVII. Brigade R.F.A. ; but for artillery brigades with numbers higher than one hundred Arabic figures are used.

German formations and units, to distinguish them clearly, are printed in italics, thus : *Second Army, 54th Division, 46th Regiment.*

In the case of such places as Fontaine-Notre-Dame, Graincourt-lez-Havrincourt, Metz-en-Couture, it has been found more convenient to refer to them simply as Fontaine, Graincourt, Metz, which abbreviated forms were in use by the Third Army at the time of the battle.

The usual Army abbreviations have been used : for example, " 7/R. Sussex " for " 7th Battalion The Royal Sussex Regiment "; " K.O.S.B." for " The King's Own Scottish Borderers " ; " K.R.R.C." for " The King's Royal Rifle Corps ". To avoid repetition the " Royal " in regimental titles is often omitted. To economize space the 12th (Eastern) Division, the 20th (Light) Division, the 55th (West Lancashire) Division, etc., are usually described by their numbers only.

In the footnotes " Division " is generally shortened to " Div." and " Brigade " to " Bde." ; but it is important to note that these abbreviations have not the grim significance attached to them in " 1918 " Volumes I. and II.

Digitized by Google

First-line and Second-line Territorial Force units are distinguished by a figure in front of the battalion number, thus " 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders ", " 2/7th Duke of Wellington's ".

Where two battalions have been amalgamated the numbers of both are shown thus, " 7th/8th Royal Irish Fusiliers ".

Abbreviations occasionally employed are " F.O.O." for " Forward Observing Officer ", " O.P." for " Observation " Post ", " G.H.Q." for " British General Headquarters " and " O.H.L." for German *Oberste Heeresleitung* (German Supreme Command).

Officers are described by the rank they held at the time of these operations.

In November 1917 both belligerents had dispensed with " summer time ", so that Greenwich Mean Time is used throughout except where German time, one hour in advance of G.M.T., is specifically mentioned.

The Appendices, mainly instructions and operation orders, are reproduced as originally issued except that certain obvious mistakes have been corrected.

Digitized by Google

MAPS AND SKETCHES

Two maps have been provided : one to show on a convenient scale the whole area of the British offensive, and one which reproduces the artillery barrage plan of the IV. Corps for the initial assault.

The sketches illustrate the objectives of the two corps for the first day and the situation on this and the second day ; the subsequent progress on the Bourlon—Moeuvres front ; the westward and southward attacks of the Germans on the 30th November ; and the changes which occurred in the British positions in various localities during the closing stages of the battle. The layered end-paper (Sketch A) shows the whole Cambrai battlefield.

In the spelling of place-names the British operation maps in use at the time have been the guide ; but certain abbreviations, such as " Metz " for " Metz-en-Couture " have been introduced as in the text.

Map 2 (the barrage map) and Sketch B (showing the positions of the Armies at the end of 1917) were compiled by the late Major A. F. Becke. Map 1. and Sketch A are revisions of his work.

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 — PAGE

Cambrésis: Scene of a Projected Offensive 1
The Evolution of Unregistered Shooting 10
The Rôle of the Tank 13
Notes: I. Caporetto (Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo).. 15
II. German Artillery Tactics 16

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*):
The Plan 17
Note: River and Canal crossings, Crèvecoeur—Noyelles 30

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*):
Tanks and Infantry: Combined Training 32
The Preparations 35
The Concentration and Assembly 42
Note: The Germans on the Eve of the Offensive .. 47

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*):
20th November:
The Tank and Infantry Attack: Capture of the Hindenburg Position 50

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*):
20th November (*continued*):
The First Advance to the St. Quentin Canal: Flank Operations of the III. Corps 64
The Advance of the 29th Division: Masnières, Marcoing, Nine Wood 67
Movement of the Cavalry Corps 78

1A—23639

Digitized by Google

Chapter VI

PAGE

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
20th November (*concluded*) :
The Delay to the 1st Cavalry Division 80
Deadlock at Flesquières 82
The Advance Towards Bourlon 84
General Situation at Night 88
The Subsidiary Operations, 20th November .. 94
Note : The Germans on the 20th November .. 98

Chapter VII

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
21st November :
The Fighting on the St. Quentin Canal : III. Corps Reverts to the Defensive 101
IV. Corps : The Attack towards Bourlon Resumed 108
The Decision to Go On 115
Note : The Germans on the 21st November .. 118

Chapter VIII

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
22nd–27th November : The Capture of Bourlon Wood
22nd November 120
23rd November 126
24th November 136
Note : The Germans, 22nd–24th November .. 141

Chapter IX

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
22nd–27th November : The Capture of Bourlon Wood (*concluded*) :
25th November 144
26th November 149
27th November 153
Note : The Germans, 25th–27th November .. 159

Chapter X

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
The Defensive Front, 22nd–27th November 162
28th and 29th November : The General Situation .. 164
The German Plans for the Counter-Stroke 173

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI

PAGE

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
The German Counter-Stroke, 30th November :
VII. Corps : Loss of Villers Guislain 176
Right Flank of the III. Corps : Loss and Recapture of Gouzeaucourt : Loss of Gonnelieu 185

CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
The German Counter-Stroke, 30th November (*continued*) :
III. Corps : Loss of the Bonavis Ridge : The Fight at les Rues Vertes : The Counter-Attack from Marcoing 196

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
The German Counter-Stroke, 30th November (*concluded*) :
IV. and VI. Corps : The Fight on the Bourlon—Moeuvres Front 212
The General Situation : Events of the Night 30th November/1st December.. 221
Note : The Germans on the 30th November .. 226

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
The German Counter-Stroke, 1st December :
The Cavalry Attacks South of Gauche Wood .. 230
Gauche Wood—Gonnelieu : The Attacks of the Cavalry, the Tanks and the Guards Division .. 238
The German Attacks : Gonnelieu-la Vacquerie, Evacuation of Masnières.. 242
The Bourlon—Moeuvres Front 246
Note : The Germans on the 1st December .. 248

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*) :
2nd–4th December :
The Loss of la Vacquerie and the Withdrawal to Marcoing : End of the German Counter-Stroke 249
The Decision to Withdraw to the Flesquières Line 257

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI

PAGE

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*concluded*) :
4th–6th December :
The Withdrawal to the Flesquières Line 262
The End of the Battle 268
The German Side 271
Results of the Cambrai Offensive 273
THE ACTION OF WELSH RIDGE, 30TH–31ST DECEMBER 275

CHAPTER XVII

RETROSPECT :
The British Offensive 278
The German Counter-Stroke 293

Digitized by Google

TABLE OF APPENDICES

		Page
1.	The Third Army Plan, 13th Nov. 1917	306
2.	Third Army Instructions to Cavalry Corps, 13th Nov.	309
3.	III. Corps Operation Order No. 224, 16th Nov. ..	311
4.	IV. Corps Operation Order No. 320, 15th Nov. ..	316
5.	Cavalry Corps Notes on the Use of Tanks with Cavalry	322
6A.	Third Army Artillery Instructions No. 18	322
6B.	Third Army Artillery Instructions No. 19	329
6C.	Third Army Artillery Instructions No. 20	334
7.	III. Brigade Tank Corps Order No. 8, 15th Nov. ..	339
8.	Third Army Instructions to R.F.C., 9th Nov. ..	346
9A.	Training Note: Tank and Infantry Operations (Issued by Third Army, 30th Oct.)	348
9B.	Notes on Infantry and Tank Operations (Issued by Third Army, 30th Oct.)	354
10.	Special Order No. 6 by Br.-General H. J. Elles, Commanding the Tank Corps, 19th Nov.	358
11.	62nd Division Order No. 78, 16th Nov.	358
12.	29th Division Order No. 167, 18th Nov.	364
13.	C.R.E. 29th Division Instruction No. 1, 18th Nov.	368
14.	G.H.Q. Instructions to Third Army, 25th Nov. ..	371
15.	Third Army Instructions to IV. Corps to Cease Offensive Operations, 27th Nov.	372
16.	55th Division Warning Order, 28th Nov.	373
17.	Cavalry Corps Order for Counter-Attack on 1st Dec.	374
18.	III. Corps Order for Counter-Attack on 1st Dec. ..	374
19.	G.H.Q. Order for Withdrawal on Bourlon Front, 3rd Dec.	375
20.	Plan of Retirement on the V. Corps Front, 4th Dec.	376
21.	47th Division Order No. 205, 4th Dec.	379
22.	Third Army Casualties, 20th Nov.–8th Dec. ..	382
23.	Skeleton Order of Battle of British Troops	383
24.	Order of Battle of German Infantry	384
25.	The Mark IV. Tank	385

Digitized by Google

SKETCHES

A.	Cambrai 1917 (layered)	*End-paper*
1.	Objectives for the Third Army	*At end*
2.	III. Corps Tank and Infantry Objectives, 20th Nov.	„ „
3.	IV. Corps Tank and Infantry Objectives, 20th Nov.	„ „
4.	Railheads and Forward Roads	„ „
5.	Situation, 20th Nov.	„ „
6.	VI. Corps Operation, 20th Nov.	„ „
7.	Situation, 21st Nov.	„ „
8.	Bourlon Front, 22nd Nov.: Loss of Fontaine	„ „
9.	Bourlon Front, 23rd Nov.	„ „
10.	Bourlon Front, 24th Nov.	„ „
11.	Bourlon Front, 25th Nov.	„ „
12.	Bourlon Front, 27th Nov.	„ „
13.	Situation, 29th Nov.	„ „
14.	German Attacks on VII. and III. Corps, 30th Nov.	*in pocket* / *at end*
15.	German Attacks on IV. and VI. Corps, 30th Nov.	*at end*
16.	Operations, Epéhy—la Vacquerie, 1st Dec. ..	„ „
17.	Operations, Masnières—Marcoing, 1st–4th Dec.	„ „
18.	La Vacquerie, 2nd–6th Dec.	„ „
19.	Withdrawal to the Flesquières Line, 4th–6th Dec.	„ „
20.	Welsh Ridge, 30th–31st Dec.	„ „
B.	The Western Front 1917: The End of the Year	*End-paper*

MAPS

(*In Pocket at end of Volume*)

1. The Hindenburg Position in Cambrésis
2. IV. Corps Barrage Map, 20th Nov. 1917

Digitized by Google

LIST OF BOOKS

TO WHICH MOST FREQUENT REFERENCE HAS BEEN MADE

BAVARIAN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT: "Die Bayern im Grossen Kriege "1914–1918". (Munich: Verlag des bayerischen Kriegsarchivs.)

A record of the achievements of the Bavarian troops in all theatres of war.

BERNHARDI: "Deutschlands Heldenkampf". (Munich: Lehmann.)

BORCHERT: "Der Kampf gegen Tanks". By Major M. Borchert. (Berlin: Mittler.)

The author is concerned solely with the Cambrai battle, but his one chapter of value is that describing German defensive measures against future tank attacks.

BRUCHMÜLLER: "Die Artillerie beim Angriff im Stellungskrieg". By Colonel Bruchmüller. (Berlin: Offene Worte.)

An historical survey of the development of German artillery tactics, 1914–1918, by the well-known artillery expert of the German Army.

CONQUET: "La Bataille de Caporetto". By Colonel Conquet. (Paris: Plon.)

GEHRE: "Die deutsche Kraftverteilung während des Welt-"kriegs". By L. Gehre. (Berlin: Mittler.)

Contains a large coloured diagram showing, under the various fronts and Armies, the German strength in divisions on the 15th and last days of every month of the war.

GERMAN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT (G.O.A.): "Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis "1918: Die militärischen Operationen zu Lande", compiled by the Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres. (Berlin: Mittler.)

Volume XIII, published in 1942, covers the summer and autumn operations, 1917, and events outside the Western Front up to November 1918. The space devoted to the Battle of Cambrai is of necessity limited.

ISONZO I.: "Die Durchbruch am Isonzo, I. Teil". (Oldenburg: Stalling.)

The official monograph issued by the Reichsarchiv. It describes the preparations for the Battle of Caporetto and the first four days' fighting.

JOCHIM: "Die Vorbereitung des deutschen Heeres für die "Grosse Schlacht in Frankreich in Frühjahr 1918. I. "Grundsätze für die Führung". By Colonel Jochim. (Berlin: Mittler.)

The first of five volumes explaining the tactical principles upon which the German armies were trained for their 1918 offensives.

LUDENDORFF: "My War Memories 1914–1918". By General Erich Ludendorff. (English Edition: Hutchinson & Co).

Digitized by Google

MOSER: "Feldzugsaufzeichnungen 1914–18". By General Otto von Moser. (Chr. Belsersche Verlagsbuchhandlung: Stuttgart.)

The author's war reminiscences as brigade, division and corps commander.

"REGT. NO. . . ." These are references to the war histories of German regiments. The volumes vary in length and value: some give detailed accounts of the operations with extracts from the reminiscences of combatants; others merely reproduce the official war diaries. Some of the latter type have been supplemented by fuller accounts.

RUPPRECHT: "Mein Kriegstagebuch". By Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. Edited by E. von Frauenholz. (Munich: Deutsche National Verlag.)

Extracts from the diaries and papers of the Crown Prince in three volumes. A very valuable source and commentary.

SCHLACHTEN UND GEFECHTE: "Die Schlachten und Gefechte "des grossen Krieges 1914–18 zusammengestellt vom "grossen Generalstab". (Berlin: Sack.)

An official list of the battles, compiled by the Great General Staff, showing the formations engaged and giving a list of the higher commanders.

TANKSCHLACHT: "Die Tankschlacht bei Cambrai 1917". (Oldenburg: Stalling.)

The official monograph, issued by the Reichsarchiv, on the Battle of Cambrai. It does not include the German counter-attack.

ZINDLER: An article in "Wissen und Wehr", May 1937, by Oberleutnant der Reserve E. Zindler.

He describes the fashion in which the German 54th Division met the tank attack upon the 20th November 1917.

Note:

"1915" Vol. II. (Battles of Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Loos)	The Official History of the Great War. Military Operations France and Belgium.
"1917" Vol. I. (The German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line and the Battles of Arras)	do. do.
"1918" Vol. I. (The German March Offensive and its Preliminaries)	do. do.
"Transportation" (Transportation on the Western Front 1914–1918)	do. do.
"The War in the Air" Vol. IV. (1917–1918)	The Official History of the R.A.F. in the Great War.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I

The Battle of Cambrai 1917

Cambrésis : Scene for a Projected Offensive (Map 1 ; Sketches A, 1)

In the spring of 1917 the British Fourth Army had followed up the withdrawal of the Germans to their defensive system, organized in considerable depth, called the *Siegfried Stellung* but known to the British as the " Hindenburg Line". The right of the Army approached the region of St. Quentin ; on the left, after the Somme battlefields of 1916 had been traversed, the advance was in the direction of Cambrai until it confronted the enemy's outpost positions some seven miles from that town.[1]

Those parts of Pas de Calais and the Departement du Nord which lie south-west of Cambrai are open rolling downland, loam with a substratum of chalk,[2] which falls gradually from south to north divided into ridges by narrow drainage valleys. This country differs little in character from that of the Somme, scene of the 1916 fighting. It is cut, from south to north, by one very important feature, the valley of the upper Schelde, whose course provides the lie of the canal linking St. Quentin with Cambrai and the Senseé river.[3].

Between Vendhuille and Banteux, for 3½ miles, the valley is narrow and steep-sided, forming, with river and canal, a considerable obstacle ; northwards it widens out near the double bend at Crèvecoeur, and, as Cambrai is approached, it becomes flat and open. From west to east the downland is traversed by Grand Ravin, actually a large drainage ditch, nowhere more than seven feet wide, at the bottom of an open valley ; the other streams in the small narrow valleys falling to the St. Quentin canal and Grand Ravin are usually dry except after heavy rain.

West of Havrincourt village is the Canal du Nord which connects the Somme with the Sensée. This canal was in

---

[1] See " 1917 " Vol. I.

[2] The general formation is chalk with sand and loam on top, but the chalk is often exposed on the slopes and in the valleys.

[3] The canal is 60 feet wide at the top and 33 feet at the bottom ; it contained from six to seven feet of water. Hereafter the double waterway will, for convenience, often be styled the St. Quentin canal.

Digitized by Google

course of construction in 1914 and the excavations had been completed, but there was no water in it.[1]

Main roads and railways in this region are few. The St. Quentin–Cambrai highway dips down to cross the canal north of Banteux and then ascends to Lateau Wood, where it is joined by the pavé road running north-eastward from Péronne, and descends into the valley beyond to cross the canal again at Masnières. The main road from Bapaume bridges the Canal du Nord on the low ground south of Moeuvres and passes to Cambrai under the southern side of the Bourlon ridge. One main railway line, that from Péronne to Cambrai via Epéhy and Villers Plouich, crosses the canal at Marcoing, where it is joined by a branch line from Bapaume. The railway from St. Quentin enters Cambrai through its eastern suburbs and lay well behind the German front. Local communications, country roads and single track and narrow-gauge railway lines, were well developed.

Across this tract of country, from south-east to north-west, lay part of the Hindenburg system of defences, constructed without interference whilst the scene of hostilities was well to the westward. The position embodied the latest German theory of an active defence in depth.[2]

The outpost zone, its forward edge well wired, consisted of disconnected lengths of trench, boarded but not revetted, of an average width of 5½ feet at the top and three feet at the bottom, and a depth of six feet. In this area, as also in the battle zone and the rearward battle zone, self-contained centres of resistance[3] were sited chequerwise; these included a number of farm houses and other isolated buildings organized for defence. North-west of Banteux the outpost zone included the fortified village of la Vacquerie and, south of Havrincourt, it ran through the north-eastern arm of Havrincourt Wood; beyond the village its forward edge made a right-angled turn to follow the eastern bank of the Canal du Nord which it crossed half a mile farther north to include the "Spoil Heap," a prominent feature nearly four hundred yards long and sixty feet high.

[1] Its depth varied, being greatest, 90 feet below ground level, at a cutting through the Havrincourt ridge. In places the width at the top was as much as 120 feet.

[2] See "1917" Vol. I. pp. 91–2.

[3] Named by the Germans *Widas* (*Widerstandsnester*).

Digitized by Google

The Hindenburg front trench system, which formed the forward edge of the battle zone, was a serious obstacle. The average measurements of the fire trench were 10 feet in width at the top, 3½ feet at the bottom, and 7½ feet in depth. The fire steps were revetted only in places. There were four rows of wire, with projecting triangles, each belt being about 12 yards in width and three feet high, forming a zone 100 yards in depth. It was believed that the size of the trenches had been designed to make them tank-proof, for in places they were wider than 12 feet. The support trench was similar in character. These defences which, for the most part, ran along the reverse slopes of the spurs falling north-eastward and northward between the two canals, edged the eastern arm of Havrincourt Wood and incorporated the village itself. After turning north they crossed the Canal du Nord opposite Demicourt and followed the western bank as far as Moeuvres.

The support system, forming the rear edge of the battle zone, consisted, also, of a front and a support trench, each with three or four belts of wire, and with numerous dug-outs in the support trench. The main communication trenches which crossed the battle zone were wired on both sides. In this area the centres of resistance included the village of Ribécourt in Grand Ravin ; the defended locality of Lateau Wood on the Bonavis ridge lay actually in the support system as did Flesquières, situated high on the northern (reverse) slope of the Havrincourt–Flesquières ridge.

Many of the German battery positions were close behind the Hindenburg support system, which was backed by a further line of defences, increasing the depth of the whole defended area to 6,000–8,000 yards. This back line, called " Siegfried II " or " S II " by the Germans, was actually the front system of a second Hindenburg position. Known to the British, later, as the Masnières–Beaurevoir line, it ran almost due north from Beaurevoir[1] to Crèvecoeur which was included in its defences ; passed behind Masnières; crossed to the near side of the St. Quentin canal south of Noyelles ; and continued north-westward to Bourlon Wood, this part being known to us as the " Cantaing line ". From Crèvecoeur to Bourlon Wood one belt of wire ran in front of it. The trenches were not very deep, but were provided

[1] Fourteen miles south of Cambrai.

Digitized by Google

with dug-outs ; and, even as they stood, they formed a considerable obstacle and a useful rallying line. Masnières and Marcoing, Noyelles and Cantaing, were all organised for defence.

Despite its undoubted strength the Hindenburg Position between the two canals—more precisely defined as between Banteux and Havrincourt—invited British attention as a sector in which an offensive might reap particular advantages. If the front and support systems of trenches could be broken through, a comparatively short advance northward would threaten the whole German line where it bulged westward and north-westward as far as the Sensée river : a bigger operation in the direction of, and past, Cambrai might dislocate the enemy's defences and communications over a wide area both to north and south.[1]

A proposal for an attack upon the Cambrai front had, indeed, been mentioned between the British and French Commanders-in-Chief on the 24th April, 1917, when the Battle of Arras was still in progress and Sir Douglas Haig was much concerned to prevent the closing down of French offensive operations. General Nivelle had then favoured a suggestion that his forces should attack on either side of St. Quentin simultaneously with a British attack upon the Hindenburg Position in the neighbourhood of Havrincourt. Next day Sir Douglas Haig directed Generals Rawlinson and Gough, commanding respectively the British Fourth and Fifth Armies, to prepare plans for breaking the German defences between Banteux and Havrincourt.[2] Consequently on the 1st May the Fourth Army called upon the III. Corps to submit a scheme " to attack the Hindenburg line between " the Canal St. Quentin and Canal du Nord and to occupy " the Havrincourt–Flesquières ridge. The object is to " enable further attacks to be pressed northwards from the " east side of the Canal du Nord ".

The III. Corps plan was not submitted until the 19th June. It reckoned upon an assault in four methodical and rather leisurely stages, with the establishment on the right of a

[1] Sketch 1.

[2] See " 1917 " Vol. I. pp. 410–11. At this time the Fourth Army was still engaged in closing up to the Hindenburg defences by wresting from the enemy his forward covering positions ; the right of the Fifth Army, next to the Fourth, lay due west of Havrincourt.

Digitized by Google

defensive flank along the Bonavis ridge and the forward slopes above Marcoing.[1] G.H.Q. ordered the preliminary preparations to be put in hand.

Meanwhile at Amiens on the 18th May Sir Douglas Haig had told General Pétain, Nivelle's successor, that, if for any reason he did not proceed with his " northern operations " after the capture of the Messines ridge, he had in mind an attack on the Hindenburg Position in the neighbourhood of the Havrincourt–Flesquières ridge, and suggested that the French might deliver simultaneously an enveloping attack at St. Quentin.[2] Subsequently British attention was occupied mainly with the Flanders offensive, and the concentrations in the north resulted in the Fifth Army front being taken over at the end of May by the Third Army which on 5th July, relieved the Fourth between Havrincourt and the left of the French.

Thus to the Third Army commanded by General Hon. Sir Julian Byng[3] fell the legacy of a projected offensive at Cambrai, the Havrincourt–Flesquières ridge being accepted as the immediate objective.

The Commander-in-Chief looked upon the tanks as " an " adjunct to the infantry attack ", but preserved an open mind as to their future employment in offensive warfare, when, if British resources permitted, he thought they might play an important part in the exploitation of success.[4] Thus at G.H.Q. a not unsympathetic hearing was assured to fresh proposals for the utilization of the new arm. Such proposals came early in August from Br.-General H. J. Elles, commanding the Tank Corps in France, and Lieut.-Colonel J. F. C. Fuller, his chief General Staff officer. Both were eager to see the armoured fighting vehicle operating in its own right as an essential factor in the offensive : both were convinced that this opportunity would not arise in Flanders where shell craters filled with water and broken drainage ditches converted flat land into swamp.

[1] The six divisions to be employed equalled the number which (apart from the cavalry) was used on 20th November, the first day of the actual offensive.

[2] The French completed the relief of the Fourth Army front as far to the north as the vicinity of Pontruet on 20th May.

[3] He had succeeded Gen. Sir E. Allenby on 7th June when the latter left to take up his Egypt and Palestine command.

[4] From the outset Sir Douglas Haig had appreciated the fact that, under favourable conditions, the tank saved infantry casualties.

Digitized by Google

At the beginning of August Br.-General Elles suggested to G.H.Q. an attack, employing three or four divisions, directed at Lille from the old battlefront Festubert—Neuve Chapelle, where facilities for the concentration and movement of tanks were good and the German defences not particularly strong. Nothing came of this, as the reinforcements which the First Army considered necessary for such an enterprise could not be supplied. Lieut.-Colonel Fuller had prepared a scheme for the capture of St. Quentin with two brigades of tanks, four divisions (of which two were to be French), and three cavalry divisions. This was viewed unfavourably by Br.-General Elles, who thought that G.H.Q. might object to calling upon the French to co-operate. On the 4th August, however, Lieut.-Colonel Fuller was ready with a second scheme: a raid on a big scale of the hit-and-run variety, aiming at the destruction of as many hostile guns as possible in the area Banteux—Crèvecoeur—Marcoing—Ribécourt. The tanks were to effect surprise by crashing through the German wire and trenches, and, as an alternative to effective artillery support, which seemed difficult to provide, Colonel Fuller proposed low-flying attacks by the R.F.C. He reckoned that tank action to the eastward would be circumscribed by the canal.

On the same day, the 4th August, at G.H.Q. Br.-General Elles secured the interest—perhaps no more could be expected at the moment, for the operations in Flanders were now proceeding—of Br.-General J. H. Davidson, Chief of the Operations Section at G.H.Q. Colonel J. Hardress Lloyd, commanding the III. Tank Brigade, took the scheme to the commander of the Third Army on the 5th August, and General Byng proved more than willing to incorporate some such tank action in his contemplated offensive. Next day saw him at G.H.Q., but the time was not yet ripe for a decision; attention was still focused upon the northern battle.

Meanwhile another progressive soldier, Br.-General H. H. Tudor, commanding the artillery of the 9th Division which was holding a sector of the IV. Corps front near Cambrai, conceived the idea of a surprise attack as a diversion from the slow and costly operations to which the British armies had been committed east of Ypres. To secure surprise he advocated that reliance be placed upon survey methods of gun-laying instead of allowing preliminary registration by

Digitized by Google

the usual practice of trial and error with ground and air observation; and that the tanks should crush passages through the wire for the infantry when the sudden assault was delivered. Thus no wire-cutting by the artillery would be required, and no guns need open fire before the actual zero hour.

Br.-General Tudor discussed the scheme with Br.-General H. De Pree, B.G.G.S. IV. Corps, and the latter drew up a plan of operations which secured the approval of Lieut.-General Sir C. L. Woollcombe, the corps commander. Br.-General Tudor wished "to advance to Flesquières ridge, "swing left and roll up the German line to the Scarpe, with "cavalry operating towards Cambrai"; but the actual plan was for a smaller operation, having regard to the strength of the forces immediately available. Little more was aimed at than the seizure of the Hindenburg front and support systems between the two canals, with the destruction of the German forces in this area including a certain number of guns. The troops required were estimated at three divisions, two cavalry brigades, eight field artillery brigades, and the Third Army heavy artillery "circus" for counter battery work; the number of tanks was to be settled by the Tank Corps.

Lieut.-General Woollcombe sent the scheme to the Third Army on the 23rd August, recommending that an officer of the Tank Corps be sent to reconnoitre the IV. Corps front and approve of its suitability for tank action. Br.-General Elles, who paid three visits to the Third Army between the 29th August and the 6th September, was able to do so. Havrincourt Wood, still full of undergrowth, reached right up to the German lines and almost into Havrincourt itself, providing, together with the villages behind it, much of the shelter needed to hide the concentration of tanks and guns. In contrast to so many parts of the front the surface of the ground was scarcely scarred by shell fire; the close growth of grass promised good going for track vehicles even after rain; and, providing that the tanks proved capable of crossing the formidable trenches of the Hindenburg Position, there seemed nothing to prevent the attack sweeping forward to the St. Quentin canal.

On his first visit to the Third Army Br.-General Elles had suggested that the scope of attack might well be enlarged. General Byng, who was quite ready to rely upon the new

Digitized by Google

tactics, proved of the same mind. He was attracted by the opportunities which would accrue if the surprise were complete and a swift advance rendered comparatively easy. British Intelligence had estimated, correctly enough, that the German defences in the area between the two canals were held by no more than the equivalent of two divisions[1]; and calculated that from the hour of alarm 48 hours must elapse before enemy reinforcements could arrive in sufficient strength to influence the battle. The Third Army commander therefore anticipated a breakdown of enemy resistance which would enable tank action to be followed by cavalry action upon a large scale. As a cavalryman he looked forward to a spectacular and far-reaching success: an advance northward to the Sensée river and, by the use of the whole Cavalry Corps, a break through north-eastward past Cambrai to cut deeply into the German communications.

A plan framed on these lines was placed before the Commander-in-Chief, and impressed him favourably; but, as was pointed out by Lieut.-General Kiggell, the C.G.S., there were not enough troops available whilst the Battle of Ypres continued and it was not possible to say when the fighting in that area would end. General Byng was told to elaborate his scheme so far as was possible and make any preparations he could without imperilling its secrecy.[2]

So the projected offensive remained in suspense until the middle of September when, although preparations were being made to renew the offensive in Flanders, Sir Douglas Haig was again reviewing plans for limited operations at other points on the British front. A scheme for an attack at Lens, with tanks, by the First Army was being worked out by the Tank Corps when, on the 16th, General Byng appeared at G.H.Q., with the Cambrai plan prepared in as much detail as had been possible. He asked for five of his divisions, each of which was short of, approximately, three thousand men to be made up to establishment.[3] Sir Douglas

[1] See Note at end of Chapter III.

[2] On 1st September Maj.-Gen. Vaughan, M.G.G.S. Third Army, wrote to Br.-General De Pree, B.G.G.S. IV. Corps, informing him that the C.G.S. had visited Army headquarters to discuss the scheme; there was "no "chance of the various auxiliaries required for it being available until "business elsewhere is, if not closing down, at any rate very much further "advanced than at present. Meanwhile 'secrecy'."

[3] The 34th, 35th, 40th, 50th and 62nd Divisions. Of these the 40th and 62nd, only, were amongst those used in the main battle.

Digitized by Google

Haig promised him all the help he could afford and sent Br.-General Davidson, Chief of the Operations Section, to discuss details with the Third Army Staff on the following day. It was not possible to fix any date for the operations, for resources did not permit of the mounting of an attack at Cambrai whilst fighting at Ypres was in progress; and any suggested cessation of operations at Ypres roused General Pétain to implore the British to continue their attacks in order to give the French Army time to recuperate. Sir Douglas Haig, however, was determined to attempt the experiment—for such it may well be called—of Cambrai at the earliest possible moment.

When October came a decision on the date of the Cambrai project could hardly be delayed much longer and the Commander-in-Chief gave his approval on the 13th October for all preliminary preparation to be pressed forward. On the 15th he went through General Byng's plans with him again and arranged for the troops to be placed at his disposal. Four divisions were available for training at once; and as approval had been given by G.H.Q. in September for the withdrawal of three brigades of tanks (less four battalions) from the Second and Fifth Army areas, arrangements could be made to begin the combined training of the infantry and the tanks destined to work with them. General Byng held a conference of his corps commanders and their staffs at Third Army headquarters[1] on the 26th October when the plan of battle was confided to them.

On the evening of the same day, the Commander-in-Chief was called upon to supply troops for another theatre of war. The Italian disaster at Caporetto[2] seemed to threaten the total collapse of another Ally if assistance from the British and French were not forthcoming without delay; the War Cabinet therefore asked Sir Douglas Haig to supply two divisions at once. On the 7th November General Plumer, commanding the Second Army still fighting at Ypres, was ordered to Italy; two more divisions, six heavy batteries, and two air squadrons were to be held ready to follow.

[1] G.O.C., Third Army, General Hon. Sir J. H. G. Byng; M.G.G.S., Major-General L. R. Vaughan; D.A. & Q.M.G., Major-General A. F. Sillem; G.O.C. R.A., Major-General R. St. C. Lecky; C.E., Major-General W. A. Liddell.

[2] See Note I, at end of Chapter.

Digitized by Google

Three days later the Chief of the Imperial General Staff informed the Field-Marshal of the further demands which were likely to be made upon the British armies in France[1]

Sir Douglas Haig, whose own view was that renewed attacks in the West would be the quickest and surest way of relieving the Italians, was loth to consider the year's offensive operations at an end. On the 13th November he expressed the opinion to his Chief of Staff[2] that "the Ypres "offensive should cease except for bombardments as arranged "for another fortnight, but the Third Army offensive must "go in, otherwise the enemy will be able, covered by the "Hindenburg Line, to skin his front and attack—probably "the French. That would put a stop to all reinforcements "for Italy". In a letter to Sir William Robertson, the C.I.G.S., on the 15th he said that he still hoped to carry out his "secret operation", but that it could be stopped if it appeared to entail greater losses than he could afford.

It should be mentioned here that in October the Commander-in-Chief had promised General Pétain to extend the British front southward in relief of the French: this to be done about the end of November, but only if the Flanders offensive had been concluded and the general situation permitted[3].

The Evolution of Unregistered Shooting[4]

In previous offensives the registration of artillery targets, the preliminary destructive bombardment, and the methodical cutting of the enemy's wire—operations which generally extended over some weeks—had given ample warning of the assault which was to follow. Now it was hoped that the tanks, used in large numbers to lead the assault, would be able to crush passages for the infantry through the wire, thus releasing a mass of artillery for other tasks. This tank assault might be delivered without warning; but if complete surprise were to be secured the artillery must be assembled in secret and deliver a sudden storm of fire at zero hour

[1] See "1918" Vol. I. pp. 24–5.

[2] Lieut.-Gen. Sir L. Kiggell who had previously been sent to London to explain to the War Cabinet how the demands of Italy would "affect "the prospects of an operation intended in France." Lieut.-Gen. Kiggell saw Lord Milner and Mr. Lloyd George, but his visit made no impression.

[3] For the general situation and the many problems which confronted the Commander-in-Chief at this time, see "1918" Vol. I. Chapter I.

[4] That is "unregistered" in the old way by the observation of fire. "Predicted", a more accurate term, afterwards came into use.

Digitized by Google

without any previous ranging or registration. Under these conditions, to secure accuracy of fire directed against the enemy's batteries, centres of resistance and rear organizations—comparatively distant and generally invisible targets—it was necessary to elaborate and improve on the methods of shooting by the map which had already been evolved and were known to the enemy.[1]

In the first place "map shooting" had been rendered possible by the production of new and accurate maps of the front[2]. At the Battle of Loos, 1915, each heavy and siege battery was surveyed by the R.E. and its position plotted upon a board which showed a large, accurately graduated arc centred on the battery position. The use of these boards greatly improved as well as facilitated the determination of the correct line and range of artillery targets. Subsequently "artillery boards" were supplied to all batteries, field, heavy and siege.

The plan now to be employed on a large scale for the first time also involved the provision of "bearing pickets" of which the position had been fixed accurately by trigonometrical survey and from which any bearing could be laid out with real precision. Bearings, or "lines", could be passed from the pickets to the guns by a standard and well understood procedure used for laying all the guns of a battery parallel to one another. Full advantage could not have been taken of the accuracy thus secured without another development: the adaptation of the equipment of the sound-ranging sections[3] for the calibration of guns. By this means the muzzle velocity of the shell was measured and variations from the normal noted, so that corrections for range could be applied to weapons which, for reasons of wear, were shooting short. Calibration ranges in both the Fourth and the Third Armies had been permanently established by the autumn of 1917.

---

[1] See Note II. at end of Chapter.

[2] In France the only maps (apart from those of certain fortress areas) available at the outbreak of the war were on the 1 : 80,000 scale, very old-fashioned in style and difficult to read. The problem of producing new and better maps of the ground occupied by the enemy had been tackled by the R.E. in 1915 and successfully solved, with the aid of air photographs, before the end of the year.

[3] The first "sound-ranging" section was under the command of Lieut. (afterwards Major and later Professor) W. L. Bragg, R.A., already at that time a Nobel prizeman in physics. See "1915" Vol. II. p. 19.

Digitized by Google

Another factor which had to be taken into account was the effect of weather upon the flight of the shell: wind, temperature and barometric pressure. By this time the problem had been closely studied, and the daily meteorological telegrams from G.H.Q. were an important contribution to artillery calculations.

The accurate location of targets became of course a matter of supreme importance; and, since two-thirds of our artillery was allotted to counter-battery work, special attention was given to locating the hostile battery positions. This was done by a combination of flash-spotting, sound-ranging and air observation, checked against air photographs. Flash-spotting and sound-ranging were particularly useful in determining which battery positions were occupied by the enemy at any particular time.

Thus it was by the adaptation of survey methods and principles to the laying of guns and location of targets, by the scientific calibration of guns and by the correction for changes in weather conditions that it became possible to dispense with ranging and registration, keeping the artillery preparations hidden from the enemy whilst securing a greater accuracy of fire.

The Third Army artillery staff, which, for reasons of secrecy, carried out all reconnaissance for the many additional battery positions, doubted if there would be time to fix the position of every new battery. It must be remembered that the survey officers had to provide artillery boards; establish trigonometrically one bearing picket in each artillery brigade area; and make certain that each incoming battery knew how to lay its guns on the battle targets[1]. If some of the new batteries should be obliged to register before zero hour, there was some hope that, by centralizing the control of such registration, the enemy might fail to notice that newly arrived guns were in action. General Byng however, intervened personally: he was determined, above all, to achieve surprise and would not allow a single reinforcing gun to open before zero hour. Thereupon Major B. F. E. Keeling, who commanded the 3rd Field Survey Company,

[1] The Army attached additional surveyors to III. Corps and IV. Corps Topographical Sections so that one R.E. topographer could be detailed to each divisional artillery.

Digitized by Google

R.E., undertook that the data required should be forthcoming. His two assistants, dividing the zone between them, worked almost day and night, running traverses through the fog, and holding umbrellas over their instruments in the rain. The northern sector was finished by the 15th November; but the southern sector, that of the III. Corps, was larger. The last job was tackled at two o'clock on the morning of the battle when a 9.2-inch railway gun was placed in position on its specially constructed siding between Metz and Gouzeaucourt Wood. Its task was to enfilade a road, and accuracy of line was imperative. Working with torches and lamps from neighbouring trigonometrical points, the survey officer completed his task with little time to spare. The artillery was ready.

The Rôle of the Tank

Certain divisional commanders and others were doubtful of the effect of unregistered artillery fire; so, also, confidence in the tank was as yet by no means general throughout the Armies. There were units and formations which had seen the tanks successful in action, whilst others had witnessed failure under conditions which made success impossible[1]. In August, too, the War Office, hard pressed to provide sufficient infantry reinforcements to replace the wastage of "Third Ypres", proposed to stop the expansion of the Tank Corps and even to "comb out" from it men of the highest medical category.

Although an improvement upon its predecessors the Mark IV. tank which had made its first appearance in battle at Messines, June 1917, represented merely another stage in the evolution of an efficient armoured fighting vehicle. It was heavy and slow, un-handy to drive and control, and observation from within was extremely unsatisfactory. Eight hours of continuous action was as much as the crew could be expected to endure, for the temperature inside the tank often rose to 120°. Yet Br.-General Elles and his staff and commanders, who were already looking forward to the

[1] Lieut.-General J. A. L. Haldane (VI. Corps) and Major-General H. Bruce Williams (37th Div.) had thanked the Tank Corps for its services at the Battle of the Scarpe; the failure of the tanks at Bullecourt (see "1917" Vol. I. p. 369) had caused the Australian troops to view them with distrust and, later, the I, Anzac Corps, at Ypres, had objected to their presence.

Digitized by Google

possession of a new and better model[1], had no doubt that the Mark IV. could do all that was expected of it on this occasion.

From the experience gained in the previous fighting of 1917 definite tactical principles had been formulated by the Tank Corps and welcomed by G.H.Q. Tanks could not move in heavily shelled wet ground nor keep pace with infantry until the cratered zone of the heavy bombardment had been crossed: therefore instead of being used in the initial assault tank units should be kept back for the later stages of the operation, massed in depth in echelons corresponding to the number of their successive objectives. They must not be used in small "packets", nor given vague indefinite missions. A strong reserve should be retained intact for the purpose of turning battle opportunities to account. Close co-operation between tanks and infantry was essential: each arm must understand perfectly what the other could and could not do. And tanks, as much as infantry, were dependent upon efficient counter-battery work until the enemy guns were either captured or withdrawn; then the infantry advance might continue with the local protection against hostile machine-guns which a fresh echelon of tanks could provide.

These principles were not to be applied in their entirety to the new conditions under which the Third Army offensive was to be launched. The ground was, indeed, suitable—almost ideal—and, in the absence of any preliminary bombardment, there would be no heavily cratered zone to cross. But, as will presently be seen, practically the whole of the tanks available, deployed upon a wide frontage, were to be used in the initial assault in order to pass the infantry through the wire. This was the all-important task and by concentrating upon it no reserve echelons were spared for special employment in the exploitation of success.

There was no doubt of the tank's ability to crush paths through the German wire—the two tracks would each make a passage about two feet wide[2]—but it was necessary to

[1] The design of the Mark V. was begun in Oct. 1917 and another tank of a lighter type (Medium A, the "Whippet") was in production. Design was never far enough ahead of output which was also affected by the supply of material, the number of skilled operatives available, and the degree of priority conceded over other armament and equipment required by the Army.

[2] Some tanks were to carry special mats, 14 ft. × 4 ft., to provide passages over sunken wire which could not be crushed.

Digitized by Google

ensure that the machine was able to negotiate the 12-foot wide trenches of the Hindenburg Position[1]. Trials carried out at Ransart late in September showed that some form of assistance was required, and it was decided that tanks must carry fascines to tip into the trench in front of them, thus providing a partial bridge. These fascines, made by the 51st Chinese Labour Coy., consisted of enormous bundles of brushwood, each containing 75 faggots, 10 feet long, compressed to a diameter of 4½ feet by chains wound round them and pulled in opposite directions by two tanks[2]. As an additional precaution some divisions provided their infantry with portable bridges.

NOTE I

Caporetto (Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo)[3]

On the 24th October, 1917, the Austrians, under German direction and stiffened by a German army of six divisions under General Otto von Below, attacked on the Isonzo from Flitsch to a point south of Canale, the axis of the advance being Tolmein —Caporetto—Cividale. The Italian line was broken and there ensued a rout of the Italian Second Army which spread to the Armies on either flank. During the pursuit which lasted eighteen days the Italians lost 650,000 out of 1,400,000 combatants, and 3,000 guns. Eventually the front was stabilized on the line Adige—Mount Grappa—lower Piave, and this was accomplished without the active intervention of the British and French divisions sent from France ; but the presence of the Allied forces, which soon took their place in the line, was invaluable, seeing that if left to herself Italy was threatened with a political and military collapse.

---

[1] Lieut.-Col. Fuller went to London in Sept. to confer upon this subject with Tank H.Q. and representatives of the Ministry of Munitions, with an eye to future tank design. At a meeting held at the War Office on 28th Sept. (Br.-Gen. Elles was present and Major-Gen. R. H. K. Butler, D.C.G.S., represented Sir Douglas Haig) it had been decided that an improved heavy tank able to cross wide trenches was required ; also a new "medium" type for the "exploitation of success", and 200 "infantry "supply tanks", shrapnel proof, capable of conveying infantry.

[2] 400 tons of brushwood were used and the whole of England had to be searched to provide the 12,000 feet of chain. Each fascine weighed 1¾ tons ; it was carried on top of the tank with a release attachment worked from inside. Unfortunately the fascine blocked the view of the front periscope, and proved a great menace to overhead signal cables.

[3] Isonzo I. and Conquet.

Digitized by Google

NOTE II

German Artillery Tactics[1]

In one offensive, at least, the Germans had shortened, not dispensed with, the preliminary bombardment; but they had gained the effect of partial surprise by opening fire without previous registration. The practice was introduced by Colonel Bruchmüller, the artillery expert. He was responsible for the artillery arrangements when General von Hutier attacked Riga in September 1917; the preliminary bombardment, with no registration, was restricted to five hours, only gas shell being used during the first two. The benefits of "no registration" provoked much discussion in the German Army and the method was not generally adopted for the March offensive of 1918 when, however, the Germans knew that their attack was expected; but the artillery of Hutier's *Eighteenth Army*, under Bruchmüller's direction, opened its five-hours preliminary bombardment without registration.

It is also worthy of note that as early as July 1916, in the attack at Tarnopol, the German artillery bombardment, planned by Bruchmüller, was a surprise one which opened only a few hours before the assault.

[1] Bruchmüller.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*)

THE PLAN

(Maps 1, 2 : Sketches 1, 2, 3)

The plan for the offensive explained by General Byng at his Army conference on the 26th October was based on the general lines approved by the Commander-in-Chief at previous meetings and discussions. The objectives were defined as :

(1) to break the enemy's defensive positions by a *coup de main* with the help of the tanks ;

(2) to pass the cavalry through the break ;

(3) to seize Cambrai, Bourlon Wood, and the crossings of the Sensée river, cutting off the German front-line troops between the river and the Canal du Nord ;

(4) to exploit the success by advancing north-eastward and rolling up the Germans from the south[1].

Thus, as soon as the Hindenburg Position between the two canals had been broken through, the crossings of the St. Quentin canal at Masnières and Marcoing were to be seized and the Masnières-Beaurevoir line occupied ; then, the cavalry was to pass through at Masnières and Marcoing, and seize Cambrai, Bourlon Wood and the Sensée crossings. Finally, the whole Army would advance.

Sir Douglas Haig, who had informed General Byng that he would stop the offensive after 48 hours, or even earlier, unless the results gained or the general situation justified a continuation, offered a number of comments on the 3rd and again on the 10th November when he met General Byng at St. Pol[2]. The Commander-in-Chief suggested that the object had better be more strictly defined as the clearance of the quadrilateral represented by the St. Quentin canal, the Sensée river and the Canal du Nord[3], with the overthrow

[1] See Map 1 and Sketch 1.

[2] These comments were embodied in typed communications addressed to General Byng. Significantly in that dated 3rd Nov. (O.A.D.690) " for " your guidance " was altered before despatch to " for your consideration."

[3] The base of the " quadrilateral " being formed by the forward defences of the Hindenburg Position.

2—23639

Digitized by Google

of the German divisions thus cut off. The III. Corps, with mounted troops attached, should secure and extend the right flank ; the IV. Corps seize Bourlon Wood and Marquion, on the Canal du Nord, preparatory to attacking westward ; the Cavalry Corps surround and isolate Cambrai and cover the advance northward and north-eastward of the V. Corps which should exploit the success as far as the Sensée, sending an advanced guard to occupy the hills beyond the river. G.H.Q. would decide upon the next step, which might consist of an advance towards Douai and Somain, with the bulk of the cavalry moving on Valenciennes and thence eastward.

Entering into more detail, the Field-Marshal recommended that the Masnières-Marcoing gap should be widened as early as possible. More than one cavalry division should be passed through on the first day ; but the infantry, provided with its own detachments of mounted troops, should move boldly and rapidly, never waiting for the cavalry to arrive. Specially trained detachments of all arms, lightly equipped, might be allotted, under one commander, the tasks of securing Bourlon Wood and Marquion. It was imperative that Bourlon Wood (that is to say the Bourlon ridge) be captured on the opening day of the offensive. This objective was regarded by the Commander-in-Chief, as of infinitely more importance than Cambrai : he considered the advance towards Cambrai primarily as a movement to cover the eastern flank and to puzzle the enemy as to the main direction of the offensive.

General Byng thereupon amended his plan which, in its final form, was issued by the Third Army on the 13th November[1]. The three stages of the offensive were now described as :

(1) the break-through of the Hindenburg Position ; the seizure of the canal crossings at Masnières and Marcoing, and the capture of the Masnières-Beaurevoir line beyond ;

(2) the advance of the cavalry, through the gap thus made, to isolate Cambrai and seize the crossings of the Sensée river ; and the capture of Bourlon Wood ;

(3) the clearing of Cambrai and of the quadrilateral St. Quentin canal—Sensée river—Canal du Nord—and the overthrow of the German forces thus cut off.

[1] See Appendix 1.

Digitized by Google

It will be noticed how important it was to pass the cavalry divisions, without delay, across the St. Quentin canal, which constituted a truly formidable obstacle for mounted troops. Once the way was cleared by the other arms all would depend upon the boldness and enterprise with which the cavalry was handled.

The Third Army was to have at its disposal nineteen divisions[1], three tank brigades and the Cavalry Corps. All but five divisions (6th, 12th, 34th, 40th and 62nd) had passed at least once through the ordeal of "Third Ypres". On the 29th October the III. Corps had come into the line by taking over the left sector of the VII. Corps together with the 20th Division which was holding it. From right to left the Army front was then held by:

VII. Corps from junction with the French at Pontruet to the Banteux ravine;

III. Corps thence to Beaucamp;

IV. Corps from Beaucamp (exclusive) to Noreuil (exclusive);

VI. Corps from Noreuil to north-east of Guémappe;

XVII. Corps thence to First Army boundary south-east of Gavrelle.

The attack was to be launched on a frontage of over 10,000 yards, from the Bonavis ridge to the Canal du Nord; thus the brunt would be borne by the III. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. P. Pulteney) and the IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. L. Woollcombe) although only part of the line held by the latter lay in the battle zone[2]. Minor attacks, bombardments and demonstrations along the remainder of the Army front were expected to keep the enemy in doubt as to where the weight of the blow was falling and prevent him, for a time at least, from bringing reinforcements from other sectors to oppose the main attack. For the tank and infantry assault two objectives in the Hindenburg Position were indicated[3]: the first or "Blue Line" included the

[1] VII. Corps: 24th, 55th Divs.
III. Corps: 6th, 12th, 20th, 29th Divs.
IV. Corps: 36th, 51st, 56th, 62nd Divs.
VI. Corps: 3rd, 16th, 34th Divs.
XVII. Corps: 4th, 15th, 61st Divs.
V. Corps: (in reserve) Guards, 40th, 59th Divs.

[2] See Appendix 1.

[3] See Sketches 2 and 3.

Digitized by Google

enemy's outpost zone and the front system of trenches beyond together with the villages of Ribécourt and Havrincourt; the second, the "Brown Line" embraced the support system, with Flesquières. As the advance proceeded the right of the III. Corps was to build up a defensive flank along the Bonavis ridge[1] down towards Crèvecoeur where the canal crossings were to be seized if opportunity occurred.

When the III. and IV. Corps had thus broken in—that is to say had reached the enemy's artillery positions behind his "battle zone"—the III. Corps was to force the passages of the canal at Masnières and Marcoing and occupy the Masnières—Beaurevoir defences: the third objective, named the "Red Line". Then, whilst the cavalry passed through to carry out its mission, the IV. Corps would be advancing northward to capture the Bourlon ridge "with an advanced "guard of all arms". To widen the breach in the enemy's defences the III. Corps would extend its right flank north-eastward from Crèvecoeur to the Seranvillers spur and thence to La Belle Etoile (1½ miles S.E. of Cambrai), also raiding south-eastward towards Walincourt; the IV. Corps was to do likewise by extending the left of the cavalry advance and pushing westward against the German positions confronting the VI. and XVII. Corps. From reserve the V. Corps was intended to advance north-eastward, coming up on the right of the IV. Corps to the Sensée river and occupying the high ground beyond.

To the Cavalry Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. T. McM. Kavanagh) special instructions were given[2]. Its first task was to surround and isolate Cambrai; then to push on and secure the crossings of the Sensée river from Paillencourt to Palluel (inclusive); and finally to secure the right flank of the troops engaged in clearing up the quadrilateral and of the V. Corps as it advanced. The cavalry might be expected to begin the crossing of the canal and the Masnières-Beaurevoir line "at any time after zero plus 4½ hours". General Kavanagh was to keep himself informed of the progress of the infantry and order his corps forward as soon as he judged it expedient.

[1] Called so by the British after the name of the farm buildings at the junction of the two main roads.

[2] See Appendix 2.

Digitized by Google

The III. Corps[1] (headquarters at Templeux la Fosse, 5½ miles S.W. of Epéhy) planned to use the 12th, 20th and 6th Divisions, from right to left, for the tank and infantry assault of the first two objectives.[2] On the right the defensive flank would be formed, in the early stages of the advance, by the 12th Division and, later, extended by the 20th Division with tank assistance; on the left similar dispositions, also with tank assistance, were to be made by the 6th Division along the Premy Chapel spur, west of Marcoing, a precaution in case of a check to the advance of the IV. Corps. Thus protection would be provided for both flanks of the 29th Division as it came through from reserve to cross the canal and occupy the Masnières-Beaurevoir line from the eastern edge of Masnières to Nine Wood (inclusive).

In order to secure the canal crossings with the least possible delay the III. Corps ordered that tank detachments, rallied for the purpose; should be sent forward as soon as the second objective was captured. These tanks, which would be followed by the slower moving infantry, were, according to III. Corps instructions, to form bridgeheads at Masnières and Marcoing and to seize the crossings between the two villages. The repair and reconstruction of the bridges were made the responsibility of the 29th Division which was also to provide additional crossings (pontoon bridges) on the western side of Masnières.[3]

For the raid south-eastward towards Walincourt the Lucknow Brigade (4th Cavalry Division) was attached to the corps and reinforced by the corps cavalry regiment, the 1/1st Northumberland Hussars (less five troops). This force had orders to move direct by Bonavis and Crèvecoeur and cross the canal at, or immediately west of the village. If, owing to enemy resistance, this was not possible, the advance would have to be made by way of Masnières, following the leading divisions of the cavalry corps; and the 29th Division, with tanks and infantry, would

[1] G.O.C., Lieut.-Gen. Sir W. P. Pulteney; B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. C. G. Fuller; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. P. O. Hambro; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. T. A. Tancred; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. A. E. J. Perkins; C.E., Br.-Gen. A. L. Schreiber. Lieut.-Gen. Pulteney had commanded the corps since its formation in France in August 1914.

[2] See Sketch 2 and Appendix 3, III. Corps O.O. No. 224.

[3] An Army Troops company R.E. was to be held in readiness to construct any heavy bridges which might be required.

Digitized by Google

subsequently be called upon to seize the crossings at Crèvecoeur, the village itself, and the spur behind it. This last operation would constitute the first stage of the extension of the III. Corps flank after the cavalry had passed through. On the second day of the offensive the 29th Division was to "march on La Belle Etoile and take up a position facing "east from La Belle Etoile to the high ground behind "Seranvillers." Communications were to be improved by throwing pontoon bridges across the canal west of Crèvecoeur.

The IV. Corps[1] (headquarters at Villers au Flos, 3 miles S.E. of Bapaume) confided its main attack, between Beaucamp and the Canal du Nord, to the 51st and 62nd Divisions; on the left beyond the canal, the 36th Division was to keep pace by moving northward.[2] If all went well the advance from the second objective would begin at Z + 240, four hours after zero, the 51st Division on Cantaing and Fontaine, the 62nd on Graincourt, Anneux, and the western end of the Bourlon ridge. All available tanks and the corps cavalry regiment, 1st King Edward's Horse, were to take part; also the 1st Cavalry Division which was placed under the orders of the corps. This division, with one company of tanks rallied for the purpose after the capture of the second objective, was to turn Noyelles, Cantaing and Fontaine from the east,[3] and then attack Bourlon village in co-operation with the advanced troops of the 62nd Division. Meanwhile, beyond the Canal du Nord, the 36th Division would be rolling up the Hindenburg front system from the south.

The advance of the 1st Cavalry Division was to be by way of Ribécourt, east of Nine Wood, and then along both sides of the St. Quentin canal, crossing at Marcoing.[4]

[1] G.O.C., Lieut.-Gen. Sir C. L. Woollcombe; B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. H. D. De Pree; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. W. H. V. Darell; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. J. G. Geddes; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. T. E. Marshall; C.E., Br.-Gen. S. F. Williams. Lieut.-Gen. Woollcombe had commanded the 11th Div., July–Dec. 1916, during the Battle of the Somme. Since Jan. 1917, when he assumed command, the IV. Corps had not been employed in any important operation.

[2] See Sketch 3 and Appendix 4, IV. Corps O.O. No. 320.

[3] The tanks were to serve as pivots for the cavalry movement upon the three villages, one section to each. "Notes on the Use of Tanks with "Cavalry" was issued by the Cavalry Corps on 10th Nov., see Appendix 5.

[4] Here it was to have precedence over the Cavalry Corps, but only one regiment of the 1st Cavalry Div. was to cross.

Digitized by Google

Sailly and Tilloy, north-west and north of Cambrai were to be occupied by detachments as early as possible, and a junction effected with the Cavalry Corps. Eventually the division should cover the outer flank of the IV. Corps when the latter began to wheel westward to cross the Canal du Nord and take up the position Rumaucourt–Inchy.

The Cavalry Corps counted on passing forward at least two of its divisions (5th and 2nd) on the first day; the leading one, 5th Cavalry Division, was to be ready to move from its concentration area near Fins (about 5 miles behind the British front) 2½ hours after zero. The advance round the eastern side of Cambrai would pass through Niergnies, Awoingt, Cauroir and Iwuy, and the Sensée river would be held from Paillencourt to Aubencheul, linking up on the left with the 1st Cavalry Division.

Of the subsidiary attacks and demonstrations the most important would be the operation of the VI. Corps (Lieut.-General J. A. L. Haldane) which was to capture Bovis and Tunnel trenches, really the greater part of the original Hindenburg support line between Bullecourt and the Sensée.[1] In a message to G.H.Q. on the 8th November General Byng said "With feint attacks in the intermediate "portions of the line I hope to show a continuous battle "front from opposite Vendhuille [nearly 3 miles S. of "Banteux] to Fontaine lez Croisilles [Sensée river], a dis-"tance of 30,000 yards". By this date a programme of unhurried wire-cutting, mainly by heavy trench-mortars, had started along the defensive front of the Army.

On the 1st November Sir Douglas Haig informed General Pétain of the projected operations. General Pétain was anxious to participate and, keeping the secret of the British offensive, made plans for two of his cavalry divisions with three infantry divisions to move through the gap and strike southward. The Field-Marshal, who wished in vain that French assistance would take the form of relieving a portion of the British defensive front, saw that the task of the Third Army would be made no easier by the presence of French troops massing behind the right of the attack. Nevertheless, on the 18th November, he wrote to General

[1] See Sketch 6. The Hindenburg front line from a point W. of Bullecourt to the Croisilles-Heudecourt road had been captured by the 58th Div., 14th–17th June, 1917.

Digitized by Google

Pétain suggesting that an advance from the front of the VII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. D'O. Snow) would be necessary and offering to place that corps under the selected French commander. Next day, the eve of the offensive, a conference was held at Third Army Headquarters at Albert,[1] when General Degoutte, who was to direct the French operations, disclaimed any necessity to assume command of the VII. Corps sector at the outset. Consequently Sir Douglas Haig merely impressed on General Byng that he must establish as soon as possible a strong bridgehead at Crèvecoeur in readiness for the passage of the French.[2]

At a conference of Allied staffs held at Albert on the same day it transpired that the French had already arranged that their troops should begin to arrive at Péronne[3] early on the following morning. The news came as a surprise, and necessitated hasty alterations in the supply arrangements ; but the French desire to participate had no further effect either upon the plans or the progress of the battle.

The heavy and siege artillery allotted by G.H.Q. for the offensive comprised 16 batteries of 6-inch, two of 8-inch and three of 9.2-inch howitzers, together with six 12-inch and two 15-inch howitzers. The contributions levied upon the defensive portion of the Army front (VII., VI., and XVII. Corps) amounted to 11 batteries of 60-pdrs, eight of 6-inch, four of 8-inch and three of 9.2-inch howitzers, two batteries of 6-inch guns, two 12-inch howitzers and one 15-inch. The artilleries of the six divisions to be employed in the first stage of the main offensive were reinforced by those of the 40th Division (V. Corps in reserve), 36th and 56th Divisions (IV. Corps), and 2nd and 3rd and 4th Cavalry Divisions, together with nine Army brigades, four of them allotted by G.H.Q. from outside the Third Army. Thus

---

[1] Present : Sir Douglas Haig, Gen. Byng, Lieut.-Gen. Snow, and Gen. Degoutte commanding the French XXI. Corps.

[2] This was passed on by Third Army to III. Corps which at 8.40 a.m. on 20th Nov. (2 hrs. 20 min. after zero hour) telegraphed to the 29th and 20th Divs. and Lucknow Bde. directing that a vigorous effort must be made to capture the Crèvecoeur crossings and establish a " bridgehead of all " arms " beyond the canal as soon as the second objective was captured.

[3] 32 miles S.S.W. of Cambrai. See Sketch 2.

Digitized by Google

the Army was able to concentrate a truly formidable mass of artillery: no less than 1,003 pieces.[1]

The Army issued its artillery instructions in three instalments.[2] A general outline of artillery action was given in the first of these, which dealt principally with preparations: camouflage; provision of battery boards; calibration of guns; selection of battery positions; and establishment of signal communications. The second was concerned with the allotment of artillery to the Cavalry Corps after the second objective had been captured; liaison officers to accompany infantry formations in the advance; rates of fire for all bombardments and barrages; general arrangements for forward moves; maintenance and clearance of ammunition dumps; artillery intelligence; co-operation with the R.F.C.; and the action of the heavy artillery when the "exploitation" phase of the operations should begin. The third dealt with the adjustment of the first barrage line to the deployment of the tanks; specified certain long-range targets and areas of bombardment; and laid down precise rules regarding the employment of smoke shell. Great emphasis was given to the factor that the essential element of the offensive was surprise: therefore the amount of fire on the front prior to zero day must be absolutely restricted to the normal daily average of the past three months, and no gun must open from a newly occupied position before zero hour.

Map shooting without registration was admirably suited to the support of a rapid advance, for a wide choice of battery positions had thus become available. As flash-proof cover was no longer necessary, guns could come into

[1]	*III. Corps*	*IV. Corps*	*Total*
13-pdr.	36	18	54
18-pdr.	264	234	498
4·5-inch howitzer	66	66	132
60-pdr.	54	42	96
6-inch gun	8	4	12
6-inch howitzer	72	68	140
8-inch howitzer	14	16	30
9·2-inch gun	1	1	2
9·2-inch howitzer	16	12	28
12-inch howitzer	4	4	8
15-inch howitzer	2	1	3

Includes 36 18-pdrs. and 12 4·5-inch howitzers on the IV. Corps defensive front. Of these the 4·5-inch howitzers could support the main attack.

G.O.A. xiii., in a special table, gives the approximate number of British guns, but the details are inaccurate.

[2] Dated 29th Oct., 10th Nov., 14th Nov. See Appendices 6A, 6B, 6C.

Digitized by Google

action close to the front line with a range of fire extending deeply into hostile territory.[1] All the known enemy gun positions could be dealt with, as well as O.P's., places of troop concentration, main routes, telephone centres, rest billets, command posts, and approaches along which counter-attacks might develop against the flanks. Special precautions were taken to avoid damaging the canal bridges at Masnières and Marcoing.[2] In the event of German guns, specially sited in front of the second objective, engaging the tanks at short range instructions were given, on the suggestion of Br.-General H. Tancred (G.O.C. R.A., III. Corps), that the whole of the heavy artillery firing on that particular divisional front should concentrate on such guns for five minutes. This procedure might involve some risk to the tanks, but had the approval of Br.-General Elles.

At zero hour the barrage was to come down upon the front edge of the German outpost zone opposite the III.Corps, and on the front trench of the main Hindenburg Position in the sector of the IV. Corps where the outpost defences were nearer and not so strong and could be dealt with by trench mortars and machine guns. The barrage was to be a lifting one of equal proportions of shrapnel and H.E., the admixture of smoke, up to a similar proportion, being dependent upon meteorological conditions; delay fuzes were to be employed for H.E. at ranges below 3,500 yards and non-delay fuzes at longer ranges on level ground. The times of the successive lifts varied on different parts of the battle-front, being calculated according to the infantry method of attack,[3] the nature of the ground, and the character of the defences, tank speeds under varying conditions being taken into account.[4] Although all the assaulting

[1] At Arras, in April, positions for guns in No Man's Land had been fixed by survey methods and were occupied as soon as the advance of the infantry permitted. The success of the 9th Div. on 9th April was greatly facilitated thereby.

[2] The heavy artillery was organized thus :—

III. Corps (Br.-Gen. A. E. J. Perkins): 3 bombardment groups; 2 counter-battery groups; one 60-pdr. group (counter-battery and bombardment); one super-heavy group.

IV. Corps (Br.-Gen. T. E. Marshall): 3 bombardment groups; 3 counter-battery groups; one reinforcing group.

[3] *I.e.*, pauses for battalions or companies to "leap frog," etc.

[4] The estimated speeds of a tank were :—

Downhill in the open, 50 yards per minute; on level in the open, 40 yards per minute; uphill in the open, 30 yards per minute; fighting through trenches, 30 yards per minute.

Digitized by Google

troops were to start at zero hour, 6.20 a.m., the times at which they would reach the first objective varied considerably. On some parts of the front the barrage would lift clear of the first objective as early as 7.45 a.m. Similarly, the actual assault by the tanks and infantry of the second objective was timed to take place from 9.15 a.m. onward. At 10.20 a.m., however, the barrage covering the second objective was everywhere due to cease and the exploitation of the success to begin.[1]

Special smoke barrages, if the wind proved favourable, were to be laid in particular areas : across the spur east of Bantouzelle ; in front of Lateau Wood and of Flesquières ; up the eastern edge of Havrincourt ; and along the Premy Chapel spur.[2]

There were 28 anti-aircraft guns of all types in the Army zone, distributed chequerwise in an area of which the forward edge was approximately 3,500 yards behind the front-line trenches. One anti-aircraft section was in action at Bermicourt (5 miles north-west of St. Pol), where it protected about 40 acres of workshops. If a considerable advance were made it would be necessary to move the anti-aircraft defence forward ; two sections were accordingly held ready to move up about 5½ miles to Trescault and Villers Plouich, the gap thus made being filled by an advance of one of the rear sections to an intermediate position. Corps were made responsible for the provision of anti-aircraft machine-gun defence against low-flying attack in their own areas.

The three tank brigades[3] were allotted to corps as follows :

III. Corps (216 tanks) :

12th Division : C and F Battalions.
20th Division : A (less one coy) and I Battalions.
6th Division : B and H Battalions.
29th Division : One company A Battalion.

---

[1] For IV. Corps barrage plan see Map 2.

[2] The firing of these barrages, as well as the quantity of smoke (if any) to be used in the lifting (frontal) barrage, depended upon the prediction of the meteorological officer (see Appendix 6C). Actually the forecast was " wind W.S.W. 8 m.p.h.," which proved correct, the conditions being ideal for " full smoke ".

[3] I. Bde. (Col. C. D'A. B. S. Baker-Carr) : D, E, G Bns.
II. Bde. (Col. A. Courage) : A, B, H Bns.
III. Bde. (Col. J. Hardress-Lloyd) : C, F, I Bns.

Digitized by Google

IV. Corps (108 tanks) :
51st Division : D and E (less one coy) Battalions.
62nd Division : G and one company E Battalion.

As each battalion of 36 tanks had six more in reserve to replace serious mechanical breakdowns, the fighting tanks numbered 378. In addition there were 54 supply tanks, or gun-carriers adapted for that purpose ; 32 tanks fitted with grapnels for pulling away the German wire on the cavalry routes of advance ; two loaded with bridging material to follow the cavalry ; nine fitted with wireless ; and one to carry telephone cable for the Third Army. The grand total of tanks at Cambrai was therefore 476.

For the assault on the Hindenburg Position approximately two-thirds of the tanks were to be used against the first objective and one third, together with all survivors of the first attack, against the second objective. The Tank Corps would thus employ almost the whole of its fighting strength in the primary and vital task of making a way for the infantry through the German wire and lending all possible aid to the trench-to-trench assault. Whatever casualties the tanks might incur by mechanical trouble, ditching, or hostile artillery fire there was no intention to court failure through the employment of inadequate numbers. In effect, the deployment of the tanks along the whole front of the main attack followed the principles set forth by Lieut.-Colonel Swinton in his memorandum of February, 1916.[1]

The tank detachments detailed to seize the river and canal crossings were given precise orders.[2] A company of F Battalion from the 12th Division was to make for the bridges at Masnières ; twelve tanks of A Battalion from the 20th Division were to secure the crossings and clear the near bank of the canal between Masnières and Marcoing ; a company of B Battalion from the 6th Division was responsible for the Marcoing bridges ; and a company of H Battalion, also from the 6th Division, was to crush resistance in Nine Wood.[3]

No special measures were to be taken at this stage to secure the crossings eastward from Masnières.

---

[1] See " 1916 " Vol. II., Appendix 18.

[2] For the principal crossings, see Note at end of Chapter and Sketch 2.

[3] For a specimen of tank orders, see Appendix 7.

Digitized by Google

The detachment of D Battalion from the IV. Corps detailed to co-operate with the 1st Cavalry Division against Noyelles, Cantaing and Fontaine was given a general idea of what was required. As one tank commander expressed it, " We " go straight in and sit on the Germans until the cavalry " come ".

The only tanks to be kept in reserve at the outset consisted of the company of A Battalion which was to work with the 29th Division: four tanks with each infantry brigade to " act as a screen behind which the advanced " guards will move."

For the most part infantry brigades retained their machine guns, although some guns were required to supplement those of the divisional companies in firing special barrages at zero hour.[1] On the southern flank of the III. Corps the 55th Division (VII. Corps) was to assist the 12th Division in firing a protective machine-gun barrage across the Banteux ravine. On the front of the 6th Division twelve 6-inch Newton mortars were to open a 22-minutes bombardment at zero hour upon certain machine-gun and mortar emplacements. Except for the bombardment, at zero hour, of a trench in Couillet Wood, no special tasks were allotted to the light (Stokes) mortars of the infantry.

The opening bombardment having been planned by the Army, the chief pre-occupation of corps and divisional artillery commanders was how best to support the later stages of the advance. Field batteries were given special routes to selected forward positions, some of the guns being timed to move when the first objective was won. To fill in the German trenches for the passage of wheels, fascines were to be carried; and, as the gaps crushed through the wire by the tanks would hardly suffice for horsed teams, the gunners had to be prepared to cut wire by hand. When the second objective was captured a heavy artillery group consisting of a 60-pdr. battery and a 6-inch howitzer battery, with horse draught, was to be attached to each leading division. Beyond this provision it was thought

[1] The reorganization of machine-gun companies into four-company battalions as divisional troops dates from Feb. 1917; but the process was slow as a fourth machine-gun company had to be provided for every division, and the British Armies were engaged in almost continuous operations. At Cambrai each infantry brigade still had its machine-gun company, the fourth company, the latest arrival, being directly under the division.

Digitized by Google

inadvisable from previous experience to push forward much heavy artillery until the roads should be in a sufficient state of repair to carry it and its ammunition supply. The IV. Corps, however, arranged that as soon as the second objective was secured certain guns and howitzers should take up positions near Boursies (behind the front of the 56th Division) to put down a heavy concentration upon Bourlon at a range of 7,500 yards.

The Royal Flying Corps (III. Brigade, commanded by Br.-General J. F. A. Higgins) in the Third Army was reinforced to a strength of six corps squadrons, seven fighter squadrons, one fighter reconnaissance squadron, and part of a day-bombing squadron (two D.H.4 flights), amounting in all to 125 machines for corps work; and 134 single-seater fighters, 18 Bristol fighters, and 12 D.H.4's. The R.F.C. tasks consisted of reconnaissance; bombing aerodromes, headquarters and railway junctions; attacking ground targets such as batteries, troops and transport; and maintaining fighting patrols.[1] Kite balloons, of which six sections were available, had the special responsibility of reporting all hostile troop movement to the British artillery.

Eighteen aeroplanes were to be held ready for co-operation with the Cavalry Corps from 4½ hours after zero. In order to avoid interference with the cavalry and infantry advanced guards no ground targets were to be attacked on the British side of the line Bantouzelle—Lesdain—Crèvecoeur—Rumilly—Noyelles—Graincourt—Lock 6 (Canal du Nord).

It was at this time that "branch intelligence sections" were introduced at wing headquarters and at corps squadrons, to improve co-operation between the Army and the R.F.C.

NOTE

River and Canal Crossings Crèvecoeur to Noyelles

British Intelligence had compiled a list largely based on information supplied by the French and by prisoners of war, although air-photographs had been of some assistance. Previous to the battle the Third Army circulated no details of the crossings eastward from Masnières. The principal bridges were:

Crèvecoeur ..	Canal	Lock opposite Revelon Château, fixed iron bridge 2 spans, roadways 9′ 9″ and 8′ 6″.

[1] See Appendix 8.

Digitized by Google

Crèvecoeur ..	Canal and river	N.E. of Revelon Château.
E. of Mon Plasir Farm	Canal	Lock crossing.
Mon Plaisir Farm	River and canal	Wooden bridges taking cavalry and infantry.
S.E. of Masnières..	River and canal	Lock crossing: wooden bridges taking infantry in file.
Masnières ..	River and canal	Wooden bridges to sugar-factory taking infantry in file.
Masnières ..	River and canal	Main road latticed iron girder bridge, 26′ 4″, including footways. Foot-bridge alongside.
Masnières (western side)	River and canal	Wooden bridges taking infantry and cavalry.
E. of Marcoing Copse	River and canal	Lock crossing: wooden bridges taking all arms.
Marcoing ..	River and canal	Main railway bridge, iron girders (16′ 9″ centre to centre of girder) with footbridge. Suspension bridge on N. side.
Marcoing	Canal	Lock crossing to station: iron bridge on masonry piers, taking all traffic.
Between Marcoing and Noyelles.	River and canal	Lock.
Noyelles	River	Iron bridge taking single line of traffic.
Noyelles	Canal	Iron bridge, Cambrai road, 23′, including footways.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917
(continued)

TANKS AND INFANTRY : COMBINED TRAINING

The scheme for the combined training of tanks and infantry was worked out by the Tank Corps with the approval of the Third Army which issued two " Notes " of instructions on the 30th October.[1] The following was the procedure laid down.

The tanks were to lead the infantry through the enemy's wire and generally afford protection to the infantry attack. For each objective would be allotted a separate echelon of tanks, advancing in two waves at 100 yards distance. The attack unit was the section of three, of which one would be in the leading wave of " advanced " tanks, the others in the second wave of " main body " tanks.

Each section directed its advanced tank upon the right of its objective—preferably the rectangle formed by the front and support trenches and two communication trenches. Having penetrated the wire the advanced tank turned left down the front trench without crossing it and kept the occupants under fire. The two main-body tanks used the track already made through the wire : the first dropped its fascine into the front trench, crossed over and turned left down the farther side ; the second, after crossing over, passed along the side of the communication trench to the support trench, dropped its fascine, crossed, and also turned left.

As a rough rule the allotment of tanks was calculated at one tank for every hundred or two hundred yards of attack frontage.

The infantry followed with sections in single file, the platoon frontage varying according to circumstances. The leading sections kept close to the main-body tanks, but held back 25–50 yards when crossing the wire. The three principal tasks of the infantry were :

(*a*) Mopping up : a section of bombers to enter the trench

[1] See Appendices 9A, 9B.

Digitized by Google

whilst the other sections of the platoon worked with the tank along the trench in the open ;[1]

(*b*) Forming " stops " in captured trenches ; improving and making passages through wire ; consolidating captured trenches ;

(*c*) Supporting (*a*) and (*b*) and forming an advanced guard beyond the objective to cover the advance of the next echelon of the attack.

To supplement the action of the tanks full use was to be made of all infantry weapons. If, for any reason, tank aid was not forthcoming the objective was, nevertheless, to be secured. " It is for the infantry to overcome the enemy's " resistance."

Training started as early as possible in November. It was carried out at Wailly (4 miles S.W. of Arras) by the 51st and 62nd Divisions with the I. Tank Brigade, and by the 29th Division with part of the II. Tank Brigade ; at Beaufort (11 miles west of Arras) by the 6th Division with the remainder of the II. Tank Brigade ; and at Eclimeux (back area west of St. Pol) and the tank training area (between Bray and Fricourt) by the 12th and 20th Divisions respectively, working with the III. Tank Brigade. Each division had a period of ten days allotted to it, which allowed a battalion no more than two days as its share. Full scale models of parts of the Hindenburg Position had been prepared and the trace of each sector was taped out on the ground. The misty weather prevented the taking of oblique photographs of the hostile defences, but a set taken in the summer was of great value.[2] Some tank units invited the infantry to construct any form of trench and wire obstacle they could devise as being tank-proof, and the ease with which the challengers passed over the defences thus prepared did much to foster the mutual confidence of the two arms.

Corps and divisions, even brigades, however, interpreted this doctrine of combined tactics in their several fashions.

[1] Unfortunately the trumpet gave forth an uncertain sound, for in an Appendix it was said of mopping up : " . . . here it becomes necessary for " the infantry to dissociate themselves at once from their tank and take " on the defenders with rifle and bayonet."

[2] Tank commanders were provided with panoramas, sketches, and a diagrammatic skeleton map, together with a 1 : 10,000 map for use in the first phase of the battle ; 1 : 20,000 sheets of the " exploitation " area ; and a 1 : 40,000 map of the enemy's rear organizations.

Digitized by Google

The Commander-in-Chief, who spent the 13th, 14th and 15th November inspecting the troops and watching tank and infantry training,[1] had occasion to point out that the two arms must be of mutual assistance, and that the covering fire of Lewis guns and rifles would be needed at all stages of the advance.

In a preliminary instruction the III. Corps pointed out that as it was "not feasible to register the artillery, a re-"bombardment of any strongpoint which is holding out "cannot be expected to effect its object. Divisions should "therefore rely upon tanks combined with a turning move-"ment . . . to effect the capture of these places". The pronouncement, which certainly emphasized the necessity of close co-operation between tanks and infantry, was repeated in some divisional orders. In the 20th Division, however, one brigade merely ordered its battalions to follow the tank attack and provide mopping up and consolidating parties; fortunately, on the day of the assault, the troops set no such limit upon their activities.

The IV. Corps announced that if tanks should break down, the infantry must swerve from its own line of advance in order to keep clear of the sitting targets thus offered to the enemy.

The 51st Division devised a system of its own. Whole sections were allocated as "advanced" tanks and named "wire-crushing" tanks, whilst the main-body tanks, also consisting of complete sections, were dubbed "fighting" tanks. The wire-crushing tanks, moving four minutes in advance of the remainder, were to deal with the enemy's outpost line and then "move on to crush the enemy front "line wire as much as possible." If a bridging fascine were not needed, they were to cross the front line trench, still in advance of the other tanks, and act similarly against the support line. Instead of wheeling left on reaching their objective the fighting tanks were to act on a different principle: the centre tank to advance direct on the support trench, the "outside" tanks to follow in support after dealing with the front trench.[2] The troops were forbidden to follow the tanks in section files but were to be extended in

[1] On 16th November he held a conference at IV. Corps H.Q. (Villers au Flos) with Gen. Byng and his corps commanders.

[2] This part of the Instruction was evidently drawn up in concert with the O.C. I. Tank Brigade who reported favourably on the system after the battle.

Digitized by Google

two ranks, a procedure which invited trouble and delay in passing through the tank-made gaps in the wire. On entering a trench they were to work to the right, the opposite direction to that in which the other divisions were to operate. They were told to avoid casualties from fire directed at the tanks by never coming within one hundred yards of the machines. They were not to begin to traverse the wire until the enemy in the trenches was being engaged by the tanks. In organizing attack formations, commanders were bidden to remember the great fire power developed by the Lewis guns and 6-pdrs. of " a line of tanks " at less than 100 yards interval ".

The 62nd Division did not believe that it would be possible for platoons or sections to follow a specific tank. No such close affiliation, therefore, was practised.

It is probable that the Tank Corps itself would have benefited as much as the infantry by an extension of time for training and preparation. After the stress of the Ypres fighting a great deal had to be done in absorbing and training reinforcements ; the standard of driving and maintenance had arisen steadily since the autumn of 1916, but was neither so high nor so uniform as it was afterwards to become. The workshops were busy day and night up to the eve of the offensive : every vehicle and every type of equipment had to be thoroughly overhauled ; 127 tanks, most of them salved from the bogs of Flanders, reconditioned ; and 100 sledges constructed for the carriage of supplies. Some of the supply tanks would tow these sledges, laden with petrol, oil, water and ammunition to be dumped in the rallying areas of the tank formations. Each haulage tank, with its sledges, could convey seven tons.

The Preparations

Surprise being the essence of the plan, the first consideration was secrecy. The most elaborate precautions were taken. Even senior staff officers in the Operations Section of G.H.Q. were kept in ignorance of the intention to attack at Cambrai until it became absolutely necessary that the plan should be made known to them. The Third Army arranged for many false rumours to be spread in Amiens and similar resorts. Tank officers visiting the front did so in disguise. A story was circulated that a permanent tank

Digitized by Google

and infantry training school was to be set up at Albert. Junior officers, and others in the back areas, who were in a position to make " dangerously clever deductions " were told the secret in confidence and did not betray the trust.

The preparations which had been made earlier in the year, when the plan for an attack against the Havrincourt-Flesquières ridge was first contemplated, proved of the utmost value ; but much still remained to be done.

It was fortunate indeed that, from the 10th November onward, the weather remained dull and misty, poor visibility helping to screen work and movement. The first steps in nearly every task was the provision of camouflage,[1] and daily flights over the British area were arranged by the R.F.C. in order to bring to notice any shortcomings and to report any signs observed of unusual activities.

To fix the lying-up places of the tanks much detailed reconnaissance and arrangement was necessary. The value of the woods was obvious, but, in addition, use had to be made of shelled houses in or near villages, some very close to the front line.

Shelter for the assembling troops, essential so late in the year, had to be provided by enlarging existing accommodation, and building shacks and shelters amongst the ruins of villages and in the undergrowth of Havrincourt Wood. Roads were improved as far as the front line, and deviations were made round craters ; bridges were provided for crossing the front trenches ; and the front line trenches widened in the intervals between the defended posts where they were too narrow to accommodate troops assembling for the assault or reserves waiting to advance. A great part of this work fell upon the divisions in the line, in particular upon the 20th and 36th Divisions, which held a portion of the battle front throughout the preparations. The engineers and the pioneer battalion of the 20th Division prepared and camouflaged camps for three divisions ; the signal company, providing communications for these divisions, laid out 137 miles of armoured cable to the various battle headquarters of all arms, and dealt with 2,000 messages per day as the time of the attack drew near.

More than 150 new battery positions, fixed by survey methods and provided with bearing pickets from which

[1] The minimum amount of camouflage netting required by the III. Corps was estimated at 100,000 square yards.

Digitized by Google

their lines of fire could be laid out with accuracy, had to be chosen and covered with camouflage nets before the actual work on them could begin. The amount of ammunition to be dumped for the 60-pdrs. and the heavier types of howitzer was, however, much less than that required for the usual preliminary bombardment.[1]

Signal communications required to be extended and improved but, for reasons of secrecy, the digging of trenches for buried cables was out of the question even if the requisite labour had been available. As a substitute a system of ground and air lines was prepared by each corps according to an Army plan. One main artery—armoured cable laid on the ground or along trenches and ditches, and lead-covered cable slung on poles—was provided for each divisional area. A typical system for use after the advance began was that of the 62nd Division : a cable head, established in each brigade zone near the front line, was to be extended as the advance proceeded, up to and beyond the second objective where a lateral line would link up ; in the right sector—about the centre of the IV. Corps attack frontage—a supplementary divisional line would be carried forward ; each brigade was supplied with a wireless set, a wireless tank, two amplifiers, two power-buzzers and 36 pigeons ;[2] runner chains and visual signalling stations were organized.

To maintain communications with the cavalry advance, wireless, despatch riders, aeroplanes, visual signalling from kite balloons, and pigeons were to be used. A cable would

[1] Ammunition requirements at Cambrai and expenditure in preliminary bombardment at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 9th April, 1917 :—

	Cambrai rounds	*Vimy rounds*
18-pdr.	568,000	647,000
4·5-inch howitzer	156,000	155,600
60-pdr.	33,000	133,100
6-inch howitzer	110,500	148,600
6-inch gun	6,100	6,000
8-inch howitzer 9·2-inch howitzer 12-howitzer ...	30,400	76,519
15-inch howitzer	340	649
Total of guns and howitzers (all types) employed	1,003	1,097

[2] No extra power-buzzers or wireless sets were allowed to be used in the forward areas before zero hour ; and a like restriction was placed upon telephones.

Digitized by Google

be laid as quickly as possible to Marcoing where an advanced corps signal report centre was to be established with Cavalry Corps advanced headquarters.

The country being downland of chalk formation, there was little surface water in the forward area: consequently the provision of watering points became one of the chief tasks of the Royal Engineers. Backgrounds were carefully studied and all spoil was shifted and scattered by night. The IV. Corps prepared horse watering and water-cart filling points, carefully camouflaged, on a large scale at distances varying from 500 to 700 yards from the front line; six of such points, complete in every detail, gave a total potential delivery of 25,000 gallons an hour. The Cavalry Corps constructed a very large water-point at Fins for the use of the leading cavalry divisions on the morning of the battle. Existing watering facilities were greatly increased, one at Metz sugar factory, south of Havrincourt Wood, for example, being raised from a capacity of 60 to 2,000 horses per hour. For the use of personnel in the whole advanced area between Gouzeaucourt and the Canal du Nord 17 water-cart or water-bottle filling points were installed; and dumps of water supply material, with the necessary personnel and transport, were held ready to push forward and develop the resources of the captured area.[1]

Actually the difficulties of water-supply in this region were to prove not nearly so great as had been feared. Wells were numerous in the villages and found to be in good order.[2]

The Controller and the Assistant Controller of Mines were appointed forward reconnaissance officers for the Chief Engineer of the Army (Major-General W. A. Liddell), the intelligence they gathered to be placed simultaneously at the disposal of the corps in whose area they were working. With personnel drawn from the tunnelling companies R.E. these officers were also to inspect roads, bridges, railway tracks, tram-lines and other likely points for enemy mines.

The heavy demands on engineer stores were bound to grow still heavier in the event of a deep advance through

[1] Each corps was allotted 13 1-ton and three 3-ton lorries; two sterilizers; two de-poisoners; and four lorries for workshops.

[2] In Bonavis Farm a pumping apparatus supplied water from a deep well to a whole series of dug-outs. In Ribécourt one well was 125 feet deep and had 12 feet of water in it. There were 192 wells in Marcoing alone, 30 of them in the main street; many were provided with pumping gear.

Digitized by Google

new territory. When the period of preparation began the old system of advanced corps and divisional dumps was in the course of being replaced by a new method of centralized control under the Army. However efficiently and economically the latter system might have worked during periods of normal trench-warfare, transport difficulties now brought it perilously near a breakdown.[1]

That the new system did not break down altogether was, perhaps, due to the fact that it had not been fully introduced. Thus, in addition to the large Army dump at Bapaume, the old IV. Corps dump at Ytres[2] still held a considerable quantity of stores, and the advanced divisional dumps had not been completely worked out. Even so the amount of ammunition, road material, supplies, R.E. stores and personnel which had to be moved forward simultaneously was more than the light railways could carry.

This consideration enhanced the importance of good roads and the need for the closest co-operation between the Transportation Directorate and the corps. Only the Bapaume—Cambrai and Péronne—Cambrai roads, both pavé, were really suited for heavy traffic. A report on the minor roads stated that the best of them could not be expected to carry battle traffic for more than a few days.

It was therefore arranged, under arrangements made by the Director-General of Transportation, that the most useful roads leading to the battlefield should be improved as far as what was known as the " D.G.T. Line " (that is just short of corps headquarters), and that the chief engineers of the corps should continue the work as far forward as conditions would permit. The roads selected were Fins—Heudicourt—Gouzeaucourt ; Fins—Gouzeaucourt (direct) ; Fins—Metz—Gouzeaucourt ; Rocquigny — Bus — Ytres — Neuville — Metz ; Frémicourt—Lebucquière—Vélu—Bertincourt. The roads Metz—Trescault—Ribécourt and Gouzeaucourt—Villers Plouich, reserved for the cavalry advance, were to be improved as far forward as was possible without attracting hostile attention. The Cavalry Corps had also to prepare for itself the road Gouzeaucourt—la Vacquerie (for

[1] The centralization of workshops was found equally unsuitable for the urgent demands of active operations.

[2] See Sketch 4.

Digitized by Google

Masnières) ; and on all three of these routes the grapnel-fitted wire-pulling tanks were to be employed.[1]

In order to conceal work and movement from enemy observation, areas were divided into three zones. The front zone lay forward of the line known as the " Daylight Line "[2] on the enemy's side of which no parties of more than two men were allowed and even these parties had to keep 100 yards apart ; but in certain hidden localities working parties of ten men were permitted. Restrictions were not so severe in the central zone which was observable from German balloons only on a fine day, and were relaxed considerably in the back area which could be overlooked only by hostile aeroplanes.

To meet the heavy demands for labour and material on the roads across No Man's Land in the event of a successful advance, it was arranged by the Third Army that the Assistant Director of Roads should at once place at the disposal of the Chief Engineers of corps all labour, plant and material up to the limit of his resources, retaining only the minimum necessary for the maintenance of roads up to the old front. As soon as the Chief Engineers had restored sufficiently the roads across No Man's Land and the trenches to take battle traffic the D.G.T. line was to be advanced accordingly.

The amount of material required for the road programme was very large ; it proved impossible to bring up sufficient quantities even for the work in hand before the attack started.

Seven days before the opening of the offensive two days' supplies for consumption on Z (first day of attack) and Z+1 day were dumped in corps areas for issue to divisions at the discretion of the corps. This was done in order to keep the roads clear of supply columns for the two days previous to zero hour, a practice which had answered well on previous occasions, notably at the Battle of Arras. Two days' supplies (60 tons oats, 60 tons hay) for the horses of a cavalry division were dumped near Heudicourt, the same

[1] See page 28.

[2] Generally speaking this line ran about two miles behind and parallel to the front.

Digitized by Google

amount at Etricourt (2 miles west of Fins) and one day's supplies at Villers Faucon.[1]

Four broad-gauge railway routes were available, but of these only one, the Péronne—Cambrai line via Tincourt and Roisel to Villers Faucon, was a double track. Of the others one from the Plateau sidings (5 miles E.S.E. of Albert) linked up with the main Péronne—Cambrai line near Quinconce; a second, also from Plateau, passed across the old battlefield of the Somme to reach Fins by way of Rocquigny; and the third ran from Bapaume to Vélu, thence southward to connect with the Rocquigny—Fins line.

Supply railheads were at Roisel, Fins and Rocquigny for the III. Corps and II. and III. Tank Brigades; Rocquigny and Bapaume for the IV. Corps and I. Tank Brigade; and Tincourt, Péronne and La Flague (south of the Somme, 11 miles W.S.W. of Péronne) for the Cavalry Corps. For each tank brigade a special dump was formed in front of supply railheads holding 30,000 gallons petrol, 5,000 lbs. grease, 2,500 gallons vacuum lubricating oil and 5,000 gallons of steam cylinder thick oil, the total amounting to the equivalent of two train-loads. Railheads for ammunition were at Tincourt and Quinconce, serving the III. Corps, and Bapaume and Ytres for the IV. Corps. The tanks drew from Ytres and the cavalry from Quinconce. Little change would be necessary on the second day of the offensive; but the advance which the V. Corps from reserve was intended to make would cut right across the communications of the IV. Corps, whose traffic was to be diverted from the area south of the Bapaume—Cambrai road as soon as possible. The IV. Corps control of the road was to extend as far eastward as Fontaine, five miles inside the German lines.

Owing to the "peaceful" conditions that had hitherto prevailed in the sector, the British and German light railheads were scarcely more than two miles apart: at Gouzeaucourt and la Vacquerie respectively. It was planned therefore to link together the two systems as quickly as possible and a detachment of No. 2 Army Tramway Company R.E. reached the IV. Corps area on the 11th November to study the problem and make all preparations.[2]

[1] Cavalry units were to carry three days iron rations per man and 20 lbs. oats per horse on man and horse and in the regimental L.G.S. wagons.

[2] The junction of the systems was effected successfully on the 29th November.

Digitized by Google

Arrangements were made also to push on with the reconstruction of the Vélu—Havrincourt—Marcoing line, crossing the Canal du Nord by a deviation just north of Havrincourt Wood.

The light railways were to play a considerable part in the evacuation of the wounded. Advanced dressing stations would take over the regimental aid posts as the advance proceeded; in anticipation of long "carries", the number of battalion stretcher-bearers was augmented in most divisions.[1] Cavalry casualties were to be evacuated through the infantry advanced dressing stations until the Cavalry Corps was able to open its own in the Ribécourt—Marcoing—Masnières area. Later, it was hoped that captured German dressing stations and hospitals would become available. Main dressing stations were established on the Fins—Nurlu road for the III. Corps, and for the IV. Corps at Ruyaulcourt, Lebucquière and Beugny; casualty clearing stations were at Edgehill (outside Albert), Tincourt (two), Ytres (two) and Grévillers (two miles west of Bapaume) (two). Indian casualties—except very urgent cases—were to be sent to the Lucknow C.C.S. at Péronne—la Chapelette.

Like all other activities the medical preparations, which involved considerable movement, were hampered by the need for secrecy.

The Concentration and Assembly

The concentration for battle began some fourteen days before the opening of the offensive.[2] According to the general plan, the reinforcing artillery was to be brought in first, then the infantry, and then the tanks.

From dusk on the 7th November onwards there was a ceaseless flow of divisional artilleries, Army field brigades and heavy artillery groups with their siege and heavy batteries, down the roads from the north, interspersed with such varied units as corps cavalry regiments, pioneer battalions, motor machine-gun batteries, ammunition columns and mobile pigeon lofts. On the night of the 9th/10th,

[1] By men left out of the battle as battalion reserve, and in some cases by artillery personnel. Most divisions detailed special parties to lift the wounded out of the track of the tanks.

[2] The selected date had been divulged confidentially to higher formations earlier in the month. A Third Army order issued at 2.30 p.m. on the 18th named the 20th as "zero day"; at 10.15 a.m. on the 19th followed another order giving 6.20 a.m. as "zero hour". The sun rose at 7.27 a.m.

Digitized by Google

whilst two Army field brigades and a heavy artillery group of five howitzer batteries were marching into Arras, ahead of them on the road south was another group of five 6-inch howitzer batteries entering Baupaume, and, farther south again, a third group of five siege batteries was being received in the III. Corps area. The last batteries moved into their well-concealed positions on the night of the 17th/18th. The only hitch which occurred led to some batteries of the IV. Corps arriving a day later than had been intended.

The infantry came partly by road and partly by rail. On the 15th, 16th and 17th November the 6th, 12th, 29th and 51st Divisions reached Péronne by tactical trains and moved into III. and IV. Corps areas on the following nights. The 62nd Division, which had been training in the Wailly area, marched on the night of the 13th/14th, and concentrated three nights later in an area west of Havrincourt Wood.

In the III. Corps the left of the 20th Division, which had hitherto held the whole of the corps line, was relieved during the night of the 17th/18th by the 6th Division, the newcomer being forbidden to send out any patrols other than standing patrols on its own wire. On the same night in the IV. Corps the 62nd Division sent three battalions to take over its battle front from the 36th Division ; but the outpost line continued to be held by the 36th Division. During the night of the 18th/19th the 12th Division relieved the right of the 20th on the front of the III. Corps which then had its three attacking divisions, the 12th, 20th and 6th in line with the reserve division, the 29th, marching through the night from the Allaines area (just north of Péronne) to Sorel, Fins and Equancourt. As the right portion of the IV. Corps front, with its covered approaches, lent itself to a daylight relief, the 51st Division did not begin to take over the trenches from which it was to attack until 10 a.m. on the 19th.

V. Corps headquarters, having arrived at Querrieu[1] from First Army on the 14th November, received the Guards, 40th and 59th Divisions, in and around the Achiet area by the night of the 19th/20th November.[2]

[1] Six miles N.E. of Amiens.

[2] V. Corps advanced headquarters : Grevillers. Headquarters of divisions : 40th, Haplincourt ; Guards, Achiet le Petit ; 59th, Basseux. See Sketch 1.

Digitized by Google

At 5.25 a.m. on the 18th November the Germans had put down heavy artillery and mortar fire upon a sap-head at the edge of Havrincourt Wood, and then sent over a raiding party. A sergeant and five men of the 36th Division, which was still holding the outpost line, were captured; but it could not be known what information, if any, the enemy had been able to extract from his prisoners, who, in any case, knew very little about the impending attack.[1] About the same hour a heavy raid was made upon the 55th Division, opposite Gillemont Farm away to the south in the VII. Corps sector.[2] On the 19th the enemy took some prisoners of the 20th Division.

The Tank Corps had a double rail journey to make. Thirty-six trains were required. The machines were collected first at the Loop, the next station to the Plateau, just north of Bray sur Somme, where from the 1st to the 10th November two battalions of the III. Brigade had been training and refitting. Those tanks which had been training at Wailly were railed to the Plateau between the 13th and 15th November. The whole corps entrained again between the 15th and 18th, the I. Brigade detraining at Bertincourt and Ruyaulcourt, the II. Brigade at Ytres and Sorel, and the III. Brigade at Heudicourt. Thence they moved to their lying-up places in Gouzeaucourt, Villers Guislain, Dessart Wood, Villers Plouich and Havrincourt Wood. These night movements of the tanks without lights had to be made slowly and cautiously at a rate of little more than a mile an hour. All machines reached their lying-up places successfully during the night of the 18th/19th. A practice assembly was then held, tapes being put down to mark the line of advance of each tank.

The concentration areas for the divisions of the Cavalry Corps were east, south and west of Péronne, the nearest, that of the 5th Cavalry Division, about Tincourt, being ten miles from the front line at Villers Plouich, and the farthest, the 3rd, lying round Bray sur Somme, not less than 20 miles away in a direct line. Preliminary moves began on 9th November and were completed by dawn on the 19th, the marches being carried out sometimes by day, and sometimes by night.

---

[1] See Note at end of Chapter.

[2] About 300 Germans, mainly of the *184th Regt.*, took part. The British casualties were 94, rather more than half of them missing.

Digitized by Google

On the morning of the 19th, the barometer began to fall, and it was evident that a break in the weather was coming, although there was little likelihood of rain for another twenty-four hours.

The form of assembly for the attack was based on the assumption that the tanks could not reach positions within 1,000 yards of the enemy without being heard. That distance from the nearest German positions, therefore, decided the trace of the forming-up line, which, owing to the width of No Man's Land lay, generally speaking, close behind the British support line. Thus, in order to cover the intervening distance, the tanks would have to start before the barrage came down. They were due to leave their forming-up line at 6.10 a.m. and for the most part would be crossing the British front trenches when the barrage opened on the German outpost positions at 6.20 a.m. The infantry, at the discretion of divisions, could join the tanks as they crossed the British front instead of following them from the tank forming-up line.

Leaving their lying-up positions as soon as it was dark on the evening of the 19th, the tanks crept along the tapes leading to their forming-up line. With the engines just ticking over in bottom gear, progress was desperately slow; but tank commanders reported that 200 yards away it was impossible to hear any noise.[1]

A number of field batteries were moved forward during the night to camouflaged positions close behind the British front trenches.

Some of the assaulting troops were in position by 3 a.m. and, during the cold wait until zero hour, many of the men wrapped themselves in blankets. In spite of some confusion caused by traffic blocks on the Gouzeaucourt—Villers Plouich light railway and road all battalions of the 20th Division, with the tanks attached, were in their allotted places by 5 a.m. Owing to the distances to be covered from their forward concentration area, the troops of the 6th Division had to begin the march to their assembly positions at 7 p.m. on the evening of the 19th. A skeleton exercise had been carried out the night before, and in consequence

[1] Prisoners taken in the German outpost line afterwards said they had not heard any signs of the assembly, whereas they maintained that tractors hauling heavy guns into positions in Havrincourt Wood two nights before had been clearly audible.

Digitized by Google

the assembly was completed successfully, although the tanks did not finish forming up until 5.30 a.m.: as no adequate cover existed near at hand they had been compelled to lie up in Dessart Wood, 4½ miles away, a long distance for a Mark IV. tank to move in darkness. On the front of the 62nd Division the tanks had no easy task in moving through Havrincourt Wood under these conditions. With the exception of two which stuck on tree stumps and one which developed mechanical trouble they all arrived.

A thin outpost screen was established in front of the British trenches to check the curiosity of enemy patrols, but no Germans came near. At about 4 a.m., however, there was an outburst of German artillery fire on the Havrincourt front which seemed to indicate that the waiting troops had been detected; but by 5.30 a.m. all was quiet again and this particular anxiety was dispelled. The shelling had been chiefly in rear of the places of assembly, and little damage was done.

The advance of the cavalry had started at 12.50 a.m. on the 20th, when the 5th Cavalry Division left Tincourt and the 1st Cavalry Division marched from the eastern outskirts of Péronne, both moving to the neighbourhood of Fins. Two hours later the 2nd Cavalry Division started northward from Caulaincourt on the Omignon river for the area Villers Faucon—Longavesnes—Heudicourt. The three divisions completed their assembly without incident between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m., the 1st Cavalry Division, upon arrival at 6.15 a.m., coming under the orders of the IV. Corps. The 3rd and 4th Cavalry Divisions, in the area of the Upper Somme, at Bray and Athies respectively, awaited Army orders. The Lucknow Brigade of the 4th Cavalry Division had arrived near Longavesnes on the 19th, coming under the orders of the III. Corps. At 6.45 a.m. on the 20th this brigade moved forward to Heudicourt, the 1/1st Northumberland Hussars (less five troops), which had just arrived from Flanders by road, marching with it.

The Army now stood ready for battle. Aided by the dull misty weather which had prevented German air reconnaissance, powerful forces had been concentrated secretly in a small area whence a sudden unexpected blow could be delivered with every prospect of success. Five divisions and over three hundred tanks, supported by the fire of more than a thousand guns, were about to attack an enemy

Digitized by Google

reckoned to amount to less than two divisions with not more than 150 guns.

Although the new artillery tactics did not command the full confidence of certain commanders,[1] the troops themselves knew that, when the battle opened, the familiar barrage would, at all events, come down ; and the association on the training ground of tanks and infantry had engendered a mutual confidence which had never before existed. If the Tank Corps needed any further incentive it was furnished on the eve of battle by a Special Order[2] in which Br.-General Elles expressed his supreme confidence in the new arm and in the men who were to use it, and announced his decision to lead the tanks in person. It was characteristic of the general to provide the *panache* not inappropriate to this unique occasion. His action was to fire both officers and men more than any words could have done.

NOTE

The Germans on the Eve of the Offensive[3]

The Cambrai sector formed part of the front of the *Second Army* (General von der Marwitz), the left of Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies. From a point about a mile north of the Bapaume—Cambrai road (west of Moeuvres) to Havrincourt (exclusive) the line was held by the *20th Landwehr Division* (Lieut.-General Freiherr von Hanstein) which, some eight days earlier, had relieved the *204th Division* in this, the right sector of the " Caudry Group " (*XIII. Corps*) commanded by General Freiherr von Watter.[4] The front from Havrincourt to la Vacquerie (exclusive) was occupied by the *54th Division*, commanded by another Freiherr von Watter, Lieut.-General.

The *54th Division* had arrived late in August from the Ypres area to recuperate in the " Flanders sanatorium ", as this part of the front was called by the battle-weary troops from the north. The division occupied some six miles, measured along the trenches, with one battalion of each of its three regiments in the line, one in support and one in reserve. The field artillery comprised three howitzer and six gun batteries, 34 pieces in all ; the medium artillery consisted of one battery of 5·9-inch howitzers and three other batteries, one Russian, one French and one

[1] The IV. Corps operation order (see Appendix 4) said that " the barrage " being unregistered cannot be expected to be as accurate as usual ".

[2] See Appendix 10.

[3] Mainly from G.O.A. xiii. Tankschlacht, Bernhardi and Zindler.

[4] This relief was as yet unknown to British Intelligence.

Digitized by Google

Belgian and all of short range (5,500 yards). There was also a battery of heavy coast-defence mortars. Ammunition was short, the nine field batteries having 1,000–1,500 rounds with the guns and a reserve of 4,600 rounds. The whole Hindenburg Position, however, was regarded as very strong and, if the British attacked, it was expected that the preliminary destructive bombardment would give ample warning.

To the south of the *54th Division* the front of the *9th Reserve Division* (Lieutenant-General Hildermann) extended as far as Vendhuille, the left sector, Vendhuille—Bellicourt, of the Caudry Group being held by the *183rd Division* commanded by Lieut.-General von Schüszler.

From the 10th November onwards foggy weather made air reconnaissance out of the question. On the 16th the Army commander reported to Crown Prince Rupprecht's headquarters that " hostile attacks on a large scale against the Army front " are not to be expected in the near future", but by this time some suspicion had been aroused. No information was obtained by the prisoners captured in the raids on the 55th and 20th Divisions, but from the interrogation of those taken from the 36th Division in the early morning of the 18th November it had seemed clear that an attack in the Havrincourt sector was in preparation; but that it would take place on the 20th was not so certain. In a message to O.H.L. on the 18th Rupprecht said: " The British having failed in Flanders, partial attacks may be " expected on other parts of the front."

Many British aeroplanes flew low over the German lines on the 19th November, and infantry and artillery observers detected unusual activity on the British side. The fragment of a telephone message " Tuesday Flanders . . ." was picked up by a listening station at Riencourt. The Caudry Group was accordingly reinforced by one regiment and some batteries from Army reserve.

On this day came a welcome and fortuitous accession to the German strength. The *107th Division* (Major-General Havenstein), brought from Russia to be exchanged with a Landwehr division of low fighting capacity (it was indeed intended to relieve the *20th Landwehr Division* on the 25th), began to arrive in Cambrai. The *232nd Reserve Regiment*, part of the *52nd Reserve Regiment*, and five batteries of the *213th Field Artillery Regiment*, which according to regulations brought no ammunition with them, detrained and went into billets.

In the *54th Division* the Havrincourt sector had assumed a state of readiness from noon of the 18th. Its own *27th Reserve Regiment*, which had been drawn into corps reserve and replaced by the *387th Landwehr Regiment* (*20th Landwehr Division*), was restored to it; and two battalions were moved forward to

Digitized by Google

Marcoing. The troops of the *107th Division* came under the orders of the *54th* in case of an attack, and during the night the newly arrived batteries began to take up positions.

The " Arras Group " (Lieut.-General von Moser, *XIV Reserve Corps*) held the right sector of the *Second Army* front from Inchy to the Arras—Cambrai road near Guémappe. Thus it was not opposite the British front of attack, but on the night of the 19th/20th November the Group issued a warning order regarding an expected British attack next day on Havrincourt in which tanks might take part : the attack might also include the Inchy sector (north of the Bapaume—Cambrai road) ; the four to five hours' preliminary bombardment would probably begin between 2 and 3 a.m. (German time).

The Caudry Group issued an order at midnight to warn the troops that, in the anticipated attack on the Havrincourt sector, tanks might be used.

3—23639

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI, 1917 (*continued*)
20TH NOVEMBER

THE TANK AND INFANTRY ATTACK: CAPTURE OF THE HINDENBURG POSITION[1]

(Sketches 2, 3)

The morning of Tuesday the 20th November broke dull and misty, with a light wind from the south-west. It was still dark at 6.10 a.m. when the prevailing stillness was broken by the tanks as they moved forward into battle; but the sound could be distinguished by few German ears amid the noise of the British aircraft flying low over the lines. Ten minutes later the broad array, followed by the eager infantry, crossed the British front line, the figures of men and machines now becoming visible at a distance of nearly 200 yards in the first faint light of dawn. And at this moment, with a deafening roar, a thousand guns opened upon the German defences and battery positions between the two canals, smiting also the villages in rear. Stunned by the devastating precision of this sudden storm of fire, the defenders were confronted with a new terror: the clattering onset of the tanks plunging through the gloom. Even in those sectors where an attack was expected the Germans had never imagined such an attack as this. The surprise was complete. Here and there, amid the general confusion and alarm, the stouter-hearted manned their weapons and maintained the fight; but most of the survivors in the outpost zone either surrendered or broke and fled. So throughout the dull autumn morning the British tide of tanks and infantry surged forward in smoke and mist behind the lifts of the barrage, though checked for a time at some places where a desperate resistance had to be crushed by fire or steel or by sheer weight of armour.

[1] The official name "The Tank Attack 20th-21st November" covers all the operations of the III. and IV. Corps on these two days.

Digitized by Google

In the III. Corps the 12th Division (Major-General A. B. Scott)[1] formed the extreme right of the main attack.[2] Here the 35th Brigade (Br.-General B. Vincent) and 36th Brigade (Br.-General C. S. Owen), with C and F Battalions of the III. Tank Brigade, delivered the first assault. Escaping the weak and ineffective counter-barrage which fell behind them, the leading waves swept over the German outpost position and reached the Hindenburg front trenches. Now the first opposition was encountered, the infantry being checked at some points by machine-gun fire; but the tanks moved on, crushing their way through the wire, silencing the machine guns, and crossing the trenches without the aid of their fascines.

On the right the 5/R. Berkshire (35th Brigade) seized the spur above Banteux, the 9/Essex "cleaning up" the German outpost-zone in this region. The 7/Suffolk, with one company of the 7/Norfolk, passed through to attack the first objective and, with tank assistance, carried the Hindenburg front and support trenches. The only serious opposition came from Bleak House, on the Péronne—Cambrai road just beyond the first objective, a stronghold which did not form one of the targets of the British heavy artillery. This place was taken by the combined action of tanks and infantry gallantly directed under heavy fire by an officer of the Tank Corps. In the 36th Brigade on the left the 7/R. Sussex advanced straight through to the first objective, whilst the 9/Royal Fusiliers came up to occupy the left portion of a frontage of about half a mile. Two companies of the 8/Royal Fusiliers seized a position flanking la Vacquerie which was being attacked by the 20th Division. All was accomplished with hardly a check, the Germans fleeing northward in considerable numbers. By about 8 a.m. the division had secured its first objective.

After a prescribed pause of 48 minutes the 37th Brigade (Br.-General A. B. Incledon-Webber) took up the advance on the right from the 35th Brigade, with the 7/East Surrey in the lead. On the main road the tanks were called upon to silence machine-gun fire coming from the buildings at le

[1] The barrage was provided by the divisional artillery (C.R.A., Br.-General H. M. Thomas), LXII. and LXIII. Bdes., R.F.A., with the 169th, 179th, 232nd and 277th Army Bdes., organized in three groups, one of which fired smoke shell.

[2] See Sketch 2.

Digitized by Google

Pavé, which remained untouched by the British bombardment; and, when the 6/Buffs came through, obstinate resistance was encountered at Pam Pam Farm, 700 yards farther on in the Hindenburg support system. The farm buildings which had also escaped the attention of the British heavy batteries, caught fire after ten tanks had come into action, and the Germans then surrendered. By contrast Bonavis Farm[1] was occupied without much trouble. In Lateau Wood sharp fighting occurred, but all resistance was overcome before 11 a.m. Meanwhile the 36th Brigade on the left had also reached the second objective, the 11/Middlesex and the 8/Royal Fusiliers (less two companies) meeting with little opposition. Prisoners amounted to 150, including the commander of the *1/19th Reserve Regiment* and his staff.

On the right the 6/Queen's and 6/R. West Kent set about establishing the defensive flank which was to run back in front of the Péronne road south-westward from Lateau Wood. During their advance both battalions had become involved in the fighting; and after the capture of the wood the West Kent found that on the Cambrai road, over the brow of the hill to the north, the Germans were holding out in le Quennet Farm, another locality which had not been bombarded. A party of the battalion which succeeded in entering the farm was so reduced in numbers that it was overpowered and captured; and the Germans, who withdrew soon afterwards, took most of their prisoners with them.[2] The two battalions dug posts, facing south-eastward, along the spur. Of six tanks from C Battalion which covered the operation three suffered direct hits by short-range artillery fire from the east.

In securing its objectives the 12th Division had made an advance of nearly 5,000 yards. Twelve of the 76 tanks (C and F Battalions) had been hit; but no less than 55 eventually rallied on the second objective, 13 of them which had become ditched during the advance arriving a little late. The prisoners taken by the division amounted

[1] The farm had received eight shells from a 15-inch howitzer between 6.20 and 7.20 a.m.; and during the same period Lateau Wood had been bombarded by two 12-inch howitzers which fired 20 rounds.

[2] Major W. J. Alderman, commanding the West Kent, had been mortally wounded after leading an attack, north of Lateau Wood, which resulted in the capture of a 5·9-inch battery.

Digitized by Google

to 383[1]; eight howitzers and four field guns had been captured.

On the left of the 12th Division the 20th (Light) Division (Major-General W. Douglas Smith)[2] advanced along the north-western slopes of the Gonnelieu spur and Welsh Ridge, into the valley beyond, the 61st (Br.-General W. E. Banbury) and 60th (Br.-General F. J. Duncan) Brigades following the tanks of I and A Battalions. The leading waves of tanks and infantry had crossed No Man's Land before the German artillery opened, and when it did so its rather feeble shelling was confined to the valleys and caused few casualties.

The 7/Somerset L.I. (61st Brigade) made for la Vacquerie, whilst two companies of the 7/D.C.L.I. attacked a nest of trenches known as the "Corner Work" on the north-western side of the village.[3] Neither in the village nor at the strongpoint was any serious resistance offered: after a few bursts of machine-gun fire a general retreat set in towards the Hindenburg front trench. The attack was now taken up by the remainder of the D.C.L.I. and two companies of the 12/King's, who were received with rather heavy fire, but after the front trench had been penetrated at a few points all opposition collapsed. Before 10 a.m. the 61st Brigade had secured its first objective. When the advance to the second objective began progress proved more difficult. Fugitives from the forward zones had been rallied in the Hindenburg support system and troops had moved up from reserve. Fire from batteries close in rear caught the tanks and knocked out eleven of A Battalion so that the 7/K.O.Y.L.I. and two companies of the 12/King's had to depend for the most part upon their own resources. Nevertheless they arrived on the second objective about 11.30 a.m.

In the 60th Brigade the 6/Oxford & Bucks L.I. and the 12/K.R.R.C. with 18 tanks of A Battalion attacked the first objective, which was captured without much difficulty

[1] Nearly all of the *19th Res. Regt.* holding the right sector of the *9th Res. Div.*

[2] The divisional artillery (C.R.A., Br.-General H. W. A. Christie), XCI. and XCII. Bdes. R.F.A. with the 178th (from 40th Div.), 232nd Army Bde., III. Bde. R.H.A. (from 2nd Cav. Div.) and XV. Bde. R.H.A. (from 29th Div.) was organized in two groups.

[3] These localities were held by the extreme right of the *19th Res. Regt.* (*9th Res. Div.*).

Digitized by Google

except for one point in the support trench. A company of the K.R.R.C. lost all its officers here, and finally succeeded in its assault owing to the gallant leadership of a company runner.[1]

The first objective was captured to time[2] and the 6/K.S. L.I. and 12/Rifle Brigade, with six tanks, passed through to the attack of the second objective. Once more a gallant individual action enabled the advance to overcome a particularly stubborn resistance: a nest of five machine guns was rushed by a wounded tank commander who advanced firing a Lewis gun.[3] No great difficulties were encountered elsewhere, and the brigade was in complete possession of its objectives soon after 11 a.m.

In the 6th Division (Major-General T. O. Marden)[4] the left of the III. Corps, the 16th Brigade (Br.-General H. A. Walker), with its right on the main Péronne railway track, and the 71st Brigade (Br.-General P. W. Brown) delivered the assault. The infantry followed the tanks of B and H Battalions led in person by Br.-General Elles, who from his tank "Hilda" flew the largest Tank Corps flag which could be procured. So did he translate his stirring words into appropriate action.

Few casualties were caused by the enemy's counter-barrage, which was late, scattered and inaccurate. The 16th Brigade encountered little resistance in the outpost zone, and soon the first wave, 2/York & Lancaster and 8/Bedfordshire, with 24 tanks, was in possession of the Hindenburg front system. Here the second wave, one company each of the 1/Buffs and 1/K.S.L.I., passed through

---

[1] Rifleman A. E. Sheppard, who rushed a machine-gun single-handed and took command when the last officer and N.C.O. became casualties. He then dispersed his men under cover whilst he went back to bring up a tank; and finally led the survivors to their objective. He was awarded the V.C.

[2] Prisoners taken were of the *90th Res. Regt.*, holding the left sector of the *54th Div.*

[3] Capt. R. W. L. Wain's tank was hit and he and one other of the crew, both severely wounded, were the only survivors. He rushed the strongpoint single-handed, secured the surrender of half the garrison, and fired with a rifle upon the remainder as they withdrew. Fatally wounded in the head he continued the fight until he collapsed. He was awarded, posthumously, the V.C.

[4] The divisional artillery (C.R.A., Br.-General E. F. Delaforce), II. and XXIV. Bdes. R.F.A. reinforced by XVII. Bde. (from 29th Div.), 181st Bde. from 40th, Div.) and XVI. Bde. R.H.A. (less one battery) from 4th Cav. Div. was organized in two groups.

Digitized by Google

to secure without much trouble the first objective which for the most part, faced eastward along the slope of the spur known as " Highland Ridge," flanking the lower part of Couillet Wood in the valley below. The remainder of the two battalions, with all the tanks available took up the advance to the second objective, the brigade section of snipers, attached to the Buffs, having the special task of working through Couillet Wood and clearing it of the enemy. This was done most efficiently, many Germans being killed and 42 taken. By 11 a.m. the 16th Brigade was in possession of its second objective.

The 71st Brigade had the 1/Leicestershire and 9/Suffolk in the first wave of the assault.[1] To these battalions the surviving Germans surrendered freely, although of the six tanks which led the Suffolk two were put out of action almost at the start, and one lost direction. The infantry pushed on without them, passing through the enemy's own gaps in his wire: obviously the defenders had been overwhelmed by the sudden bombardment, for the tanks they never saw. By 7 a.m. the Hindenburg front system was secured, together with 160 prisoners. Such casualties as had been suffered were caused mainly by the British barrage.

The first objective of the brigade lay well behind the Hindenburg front system and embraced Ribécourt on the left. To occupy it was the task of the second wave, composed of two companies of the 2/Sherwood Foresters and the 9/Norfolk. On the right the Foresters accounted for two troublesome machine guns; by 9 a.m. they had gathered in 200 prisoners and arrived upon the first objective. The Norfolk overran their tanks in crossing Grand Ravin and so led the way into Ribécourt where two centres of resistance held out stubbornly until tanks were available to settle with them. In carrying the advance through the village to the objective on its farther side about five hundred Germans were captured; but although this had been accomplished by 9 a.m. there was still some " mopping-up " to be done among the houses. On the western side Highlanders of the 51st Division (IV. Corps) lent assistance. The third

[1] The tanks, 36 in number, were divided between the three waves of the attack; but half of those with the second wave were ordered to co-operate in the assault of the first wave upon the Hindenburg front system. This procedure conformed in principle with that laid down.

Digitized by Google

wave of the attack, the remainder of the Foresters with the 11/Essex (attached from the 18th Brigade) on their left, experienced some delay in getting through Ribécourt and lost the barrage ; but the Germans were surrendering freely and by 11 a.m. the second objective was captured together with 300 more prisoners.[1] By rifle and Lewis-gun fire the Essex put out of action just beyond the objective a battery of field howitzers.

In the IV. Corps the 51st (Highland) Division (Major-General G. M. Harper),[2] next to the 6th Division of the III. Corps, attacked with the 152nd (Br.-General H. P. Burn) and 153rd Brigade (Br.-General A. T. Beckwith). After securing the second objective these brigades were to press on and secure, in conjunction with the further advance of the 62nd Division on the left, the sunken road between Premy Chapel and Graincourt.[3]

All started well. The hostile barrage, falling lightly in front of the assembly trenches about four minutes after the British artillery opened, caused few casualties ; the enemy's machine-gun fire was wild.

Thirty-four tanks of E. Battalion, leading the 152nd Brigade, rolled down the slopes of the Trescault spur and over the German outpost zone, where the defenders proved to be in no condition to resist. The " wire-crushing " tanks,[4] moving well in advance flattened out paths through the wire of the Hindenburg front system, and all " fighting " tanks crossed the trenches successfully although two developed mechanical trouble immediately afterwards. On the right the 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders found little difficulty in crossing Grand Ravin and reached the railway line along the slope beyond.[5] The battalion captured 14 officers and

---

[1] All three battalions of the *387th Landwehr Regt.* (*20th Landwehr Div.* attached *54th Div.*) were in the area between the German front defences and Ribécourt. The 6th Division also captured prisoners of the *90th Res. Regt.*

[2] The divisional artillery (C.R.A., Br.-General L. C. L. Oldfield), 255th and 256th Bdes. R.F.A. was reinforced by two Army brigades, LXX. and 306th, and the IV. and V. Bdes., R.H.A. from the Cavalry Corps.

[3] See Sketch 3.

[4] See page 34.

[5] Some 800 yards beyond the first objective ; the two leading battalions of the brigade had orders to push on thus far.

Digitized by Google

250 other ranks; its own casualties amounted to 25.[1] On the left the 1/8th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders had rather more fighting: the Hindenburg front trenches were captured by platoon rushes; resistance at a point in the support line known as "The Triangle" was quelled with the help of tanks; machine gunners in Grand Ravin were routed with bomb and bayonet; and the railway was reached at 9.10 a.m. Casualties in the battalion hardly exceeded fifty.

The 1/6th Black Watch and 1/5th Gordon Highlanders of the 153rd Brigade followed the tanks of D Battalion. The machines found difficulty in crossing the Hindenburg front trench which, in this sector, was wider and deeper than elsewhere; nevertheless the Germans showed little disposition to resist. Farther on opposition stiffened, for many riflemen and machine-gunners saw that there was opportunity to take cover until the foremost tanks had passed and then to open fire upon the approaching platoons. But the Highlanders fought their way forward with rifle and bomb, obtaining assistance from a tank at some points, and by 9.45 a.m. the first objective had been reached along the whole brigade front although the Gordons had still some work to do in clearing the dug-outs in Grand Ravin. The two battalions had captured over 600 prisoners between them, whilst their combined losses were less than one hundred and twenty.[2]

Meanwhile the 1/6th Gordon and 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders, led by 26 tanks, were moving up to attack the second objective of the 152nd Brigade. They crossed the railway line about 9.30 a.m. and pressed on uphill towards the Hindenburg support system which, on the right, was hidden behind the crest of the Flesquières ridge. At the outset occurred an admirable example of low-flying air support when a Nieuport Scout silenced a troublesome machine gun.

[1] Towards the end of the advance L/Cpl. R. McBeath volunteered to deal with machine-gun fire coming from the direction of Ribécourt. After shooting one machine-gunner he attacked, with the assistance of a tank, the headquarters of a German battalion where, almost single-handed, he captured 3 officers and 32 others, together with 5 machine guns. He was awarded the V.C.

[2] The prisoners of the division included representatives of all three battalions of both the *387th Landwehr Regt.* and *84th Regt.* Each had two battalions in the trenches and brought up its third battalion from rest billets when the alarm was given.

Digitized by Google

The Gordons saw the tanks reach the crest, but as the machines appeared upon the sky-line they came under the close-range fire of German artillery: all were hit and some of them burst into flames.[1] Thus, when the Highlanders arrived they found the German wire intact and in a few minutes had suffered over sixty casualties by fire from the trenches and from the houses in Flesquières. They were obliged to withdraw below the crest of the ridge where they began to dig in.

To the 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders on the left the wire and the front trench of the Hindenburg support system were visible from the start. With some assistance from the tanks the Seaforth fought their way into the front trench, but were then checked by fire from the support line, known as "Flesquières Trench", which ran along the reverse slope by the near edge of the château and village. As soon as the tanks came into view of the German gunners many suffered the fate of those on the right; others, having run out of petrol, could not move. Yet the Seaforth continued to make desperate efforts to close. Covered by the fire from several immobilized tanks one party established a foothold in Flesquières Trench near the south-eastern end of the village; but from this position no rifle or Lewis-gun fire had much effect upon the machine guns in action behind the walls of the château and in the houses.[2]

Ten tanks led the advance of the 153rd Brigade against its second objective, the infantry following about one hundred and fifty yards behind. On the right the 1/7th Gordon Highlanders captured 100 prisoners in the front trench of the Hindenburg support system and obtained touch with the Seaforth of the 152nd Brigade about 10.10 a.m. The 1/7th Black Watch on the left had some hard fighting in a switch trench called "Cemetery Alley",

---

[1] See page 59 f.n. 2. A group of German batteries near Flesquières had been attacked by four aeroplanes of No. 64 Squadron R.F.C. about 7 a.m. For air operations on this day (they were much hampered by the mist) see "The War in the Air" Vol. IV. Chapter VI

[2] Heavy artillery had bombarded points in Flesquières at intervals from 6.20 a.m. onwards, but all such fire had ceased at 9.15 a.m. The barrage lifted from Flesquières Trench at 9.25 a.m.

Digitized by Google

which yielded 200 prisoners,[1] before the front trench of the Hindenburg support system was secured about 10.35 a.m. The renewed advance of both battalions was checked by rifle and machine-gun fire from Flesquières and by that of artillery from behind the village; all the leading tanks were knocked out before they could penetrate the wire.[2] On the right a determined effort by the Gordons carried them over Flesquières Trench and into the village, but they could not maintain themselves there. They fell back to Flesquières Trench which, with the help of captured machine guns and Lewis guns from derelict tanks, was organized for defence.

The 62nd (2nd W. Riding) Division (Major-General W. P. Braithwaite),[3] opposite the Havrincourt salient attacked with the 185th Brigade (Br.-General Viscount Hampden) and the 187th Brigade (Br.-General R. O'B. Taylor), 60 tanks of G. Battalion and one company of I Battalion.[4] Here, as elsewhere, the enemy's counter-barrage was almost negligible.

On the extreme right, next to the Highland Division the 185th Brigade made a ragged start owing to tank delays, but one company of the 2/7th W. Yorkshire cleared the outpost zone and took 100 prisoners. The tanks then came through followed by the 2/8th West Yorkshire, and the

[1] Many of the prisoners taken in the advance to the second objective belonged to the *II.* and *I. Battalions* of the *27th Res. Regt.*, which had been released from "Group" reserve in Cambrai to reinforce its own (*54th*) division. The whole regiment had been ordered to Flesquières, which was in the sector held by the *84th Regt.*

[2] Written not long after the event, a few lines in the Commander-in-Chief's despatch gave rise to the legend that one gun, served by a German officer, alone in the battery position, was responsible for the destruction of most of the tanks before Flesquières, and that this officer was killed at his gun. It seems certain, however, that the losses suffered could never have been inflicted by one gun or even by one battery.

The only reliable evidence from either side is that of Zindler. He states that the guns of a number of batteries of the *108th F.A. Regt.* (*54th Div.*) on the slopes N. and N.E. of Flesquières were pulled out of their pits and opened direct fire on the tanks: an under-officer named Kruger served one gun single-handed, hitting a number of tanks in succession as they crossed his line of fire.

The artillery of the *54th Div.*, specially trained in anti-tank gunnery, had engaged with success the French tanks in the Nivelle offensive of April 1917.

[3] The 310th and 312th Bdes. of the divisional artillery (C.R.A., Br.-General A. T. Anderson) were reinforced by the LXXVII. and XCIII. Army Bdes. R.F.A. and the 153rd Bde. (36th Div.).

[4] For 62nd Div. Operation Order see Appendix 11.

Digitized by Google

assault swept over the Hindenburg front system, across Grand Ravin and reached the first objective beyond at 8.20 a.m. There had been sharp encounters at some isolated points; prisoners now amounted to 350. Next on the left the 2/6th W. Yorkshire with a company of the 2/5th leading, had some difficulty in clearing the outpost zone. Being so near the British trenches these forward posts had not been shelled; and the tree stumps and fallen trunks of the eastern arm of Havrincourt Wood were difficult for tanks to negotiate. Nevertheless, the 2/6th W. Yorkshire stormed the Hindenburg front trenches and entered Havrincourt from the east. Several tanks now arrived to play their part and some of the infantry soon pushed forward to the first objective, but it was 10.15 a.m. before all resistance was quelled in the village. At this stage the 2/6th West Yorkshire had lost 7 officers and 150 other ranks.

At the outset the 2/4th K.O.Y.L.I., right battalion of the 187th Brigade, came under galling fire from the grounds of Havrincourt Chateau on its right front, and one company turned aside to deal with this menace. After stiff fighting 70 Germans were captured here. Without waiting for infantry support a tank entered the western side of Havrincourt, where enemy fire ignited its spare petrol supply; but the tank commander maintained the fight until assistance came. The Yorkshiremen, who soon gained the advantage in hand-to-hand encounters, cleared their portion of the village, and by 9 a.m. secured their first objective which lay just beyond. As previously planned, the 2/5th K.O.Y.L.I., next on the left, attacked at zero hour a number of posts in the rather ill-defined outpost zone. Fifteen minutes later the battalion delivered its main assault, followed by the tanks which had been unable to get forward quickly enough to take the lead.[1] Sharp hand-to-hand fighting took place in the Hindenburg front trenches, but the advance soon continued, its left following the eastern bank of the Canal du Nord. By 8.30 a.m. the 2/5th K.O.Y.L.I. was established on its first objective. So far the brigade had captured 400 prisoners.

Having followed in the wake of the leading battalions the 2/7th and 2/5th W. Yorkshire (185th Brigade) formed up

[1] Some such delay had been anticipated, so, on the left, two officers of the leading company had cut the German wire by hand on the previous night, and laid tapes towards the gaps.

Digitized by Google

in a sunken road leading from Havrincourt to Ribécourt. Their advance upon the second objective, the "Brown" Line", began about 8.45 a.m. whilst the fighting in Havrincourt continued. Tanks led the way and the 2/7th, on the right, went through without a serious check. The 2/5th, which was troubled by enfilade fire from Havrincourt, encountered more resistance and had recourse to the bayonet on one occasion, whilst the tanks often rendered timely assistance. By 10.20 a.m. the 185th Brigade had captured the whole of its second objective, with many more prisoners.[1] Patrols discovered that the trenches—the Hindenburg support system—leading northward from the left flank were clear of the enemy for at least 400 yards.

In the 187th Brigade the right battalion, 2/5th York & Lancaster, edged its way round Havrincourt and crossed the first objective soon after 8.30 a.m. Its direction was then almost due north across the communication trenches between the Hindenburg front and support systems. Resistance was unorganized and by no means formidable; in less than two hours the second objective was secured at the cost of less than eighty casualties. The advance of the 2/4th York & Lancaster on the left was no more strenuously opposed. The tanks did good work at the start, but the battalion soon outstripped them, advancing steadily for some 1,400 yards up the Hindenburg front system behind a barrage which moved with remarkable precision. These trenches were cleared to the point where they crossed to the western bank of the Canal du Nord, by 10.30 a.m. The prisoners of the brigade mostly belonged to the *384th Landwehr Regiment*.[2]

The attack of the 36th (Ulster) Division (Major-General O. S. W. Nugent), west of the Canal du Nord, was carried out by the 109th Brigade (Br.-General A. St. Q. Ricardo).[3] It started at 8.35 a.m.[4] when the left of the 62nd Division in its northward advance had come up almost level with the

[1] *84th Regt.* (*54th Div.*) and *384th Landwehr Regt.* (*20th Landwehr Div.*)

[2] This regiment contained a large proportion of middle-aged men and very young recruits.

[3] The other two brigades of the division, having handed over their fronts to the 51st and 62nd Divs. before the battle, were kept in corps reserve.

[4] The barrage was provided by one brigade (173rd) of the divisional artillery and the 280th Bde. R.F.A. (56th Div.). One battery of 60-pdrs. and three of 6-inch howitzers fired on this front.

Digitized by Google

Spoil Heap. After four minutes' fierce bombardment, including thermite fired from Stokes mortars, the 10/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers stormed the Spoil Heap with little loss: the enemy, thoroughly shaken by the sight and sound of the battle behind him, either fled northward or surrendered. Then, whilst the supporting artillery extended west of the Canal du Nord the barrage which preceded the advance of the 187th Brigade (62nd Division) towards its second objective, the Fusiliers pushed forward along the German outpost zone. By 11.20 a.m. they had reached the Demicourt—Graincourt road, 2,500 yards north of the Spoil Heap, being now in the trenches of the Hindenburg front system. Here the 9/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers relieved the 10th and prepared to take up the attack.

By 11.30 a.m. the III. Corps and IV. Corps had captured the outpost zone and the battle zone of the Hindenburg Position on nearly the whole of their attack frontage, some seven miles in extent, and were beginning to overrun the enemy's battery positions in rear.[1] Only at Flesquières had the combined assault of tanks and infantry failed. Heavy loss, chiefly in prisoners, had been inflicted upon the enemy during this advance of some 4,000 yards. The cost had been almost trifling, judged by previous standards, for in few of the attacking battalions had casualties amounted to more than eighty; in some they were considerably less.

Hostile shelling had died down, for most of the German guns were out of action. On the extreme right an officer's patrol of the 7/R. Sussex (36th Brigade 12th Division) had gone down into Banteux, crossed the canal, entered Bantouzelle, and made its way for some distance up the hill beyond without seeing any sign of a German. British batteries, passing through the captured trenches, were now taking up forward positions[2] in readiness to support the the next phase of the advance which had, indeed, already begun.

Visual signalling from ground stations was impossible, or very uncertain, and little could be seen from the air owing to the mist; it was not until nearly noon that, for a short

[1] See Sketches 2 and 3.

[2] The artillery of the 20th Div. began to move at 7.30 a.m. In the 6th Div. one brigade advanced at 10.15 a.m.

Digitized by Google

period, a pale sun appeared. Transmission of orders and information by wire was subject to many delays, largely owing to the damage done to cables by the passage of tanks with their fascines, and those towing sledges loaded with supplies. III. Corps headquarters were still uncertain if the important defensive flank along the Bonavis ridge had been established; but at 10.15 a.m. the 29th Division, waiting in the British assembly trenches between Gonnelieu and Beaucamp since 8.30 a.m., had asked for and received permission to advance, being warned to watch its right flank. Just before noon the III. Corps informed the Army that the situation at Lateau Wood was still doubtful; it was not until half-an-hour later that the corps received a pigeon message to say that the wood was in British hands.

At 11.7 a.m. the IV. Corps had received from the 51st Division a message reporting "many prisoners from "Flesquières", and the 1st Cavalry Division, which had been ordered forward at 8.25 a.m. so that the head of its main body now rested near Metz, was therefore informed of the capture of Flesquières and told that the Trescault—Flesquières road was fit for cavalry. The division was to advance through the second objective.

The leading brigade of the 5th Cavalry Division was waiting south-west of Gouzeaucourt when, at 11.40 a.m., the Cavalry Corps ordered the division to advance, keeping in touch with the infantry in front. The order added that the situation between Masnières and Marcoing was still obscure.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*)
20TH NOVEMBER (*continued*)

(Sketch 2)

THE FIRST ADVANCE TO THE ST. QUENTIN CANAL
FLANK OPERATIONS OF THE III. CORPS

The 59th Brigade (Br.-General H. H. G. Hyslop), reserve of the 20th Division, had moved forward down the valley from la Vacquerie soon after 9 a.m. Its task was to extend the defensive flank formed on the Bonavis ridge by the 12th Division, and to provide immediate infantry support for the tanks sent to secure the crossings of the canal at and west of Masnières. The brigade became involved in the fighting for the second objective, but began to get clear of the "Brown Line" about 10.30 a.m. before the German resistance had ceased. On the other flank of the III. Corps the 18th Brigade (Br.-General G. S. G. Craufurd), 6th Division, crossed the second objective some forty minutes later on its way to occupy the Premy Chapel ridge. Moving ahead of the infantry the tank detachments made good progress towards the canal.

Many of the German riflemen and machine gunners who had rallied on the slopes and in the sunken roads leading down to Masnières and Marcoing continued their retreat after greeting this new advance with fire; but there was still some opposition to overcome. Such hostile batteries as were still in action engaged the tanks.

Of the twelve tanks of F Battalion from the 12th Division which went forward to Masnières two developed mechanical defects. The right company of the 11/Rifle Brigade, leading battalion of the 59th Brigade, needed the services of a tank to suppress a troublesome machine gun before reaching les Rues Vertes through which the road runs to the river and canal bridges leading to Masnières on the opposite bank. In spite of the embarrassing welcome of many French inhabitants the Rifles succeeded in driving many German snipers from the houses, the enemy withdrawing across the canal. An attempt had been made to blow the main bridge, but although damaged it was not down. Scouts of the

Digitized by Google

Rifle Brigade soon managed to cross at various points, but the enemy held Masnières in some strength, and efforts to force the passage failed with loss. The tanks took up positions from which they could shell the village with their 6-pdrs., relieving each other as their ammunition became expended.

The 10/Rifle Brigade, which followed in the right rear of its sister battalion, had wheeled to the right to take up its allotted position on the Bonavis ridge. Touch was maintained with the 11/Rifle Brigade in les Rues Vertes; on the right two troops of the 1/1st Northumberland Hussars linked up with the 12th Division in the direction of le Quennet Farm. During their advance along the northern side of the ridge the Yeomanry had captured some field guns.[1] This battery was charged from a flank whilst being kept under fire from the front.

West of les Rues Vertes the left company of the 11/Rifle Brigade encountered opposition from the direction of Marcoing Copse and 150 prisoners were taken after a sharp encounter; farther to the left still, where two companies of the 10/K.R.R.C. were moving up in support, another engagement resulted in the surrender of 200 Germans.[2] Considerable numbers of the enemy could be seen hurrying back across the canal.

The tanks of A Battalion (20th Division), ordered to clear the canal bank between Masnières and Marcoing, were given Marcoing as their general direction, and eight had arrived there by 10.50 a.m., after dealing faithfully, on their way, with various parties of Germans. A tank officer was in time to cut the electric leads of the mine under the railway bridge which was ready for demolition.[3] Avoiding the marshy ground near the river three other tanks took up a position on the slope above Marcoing Copse, whence they could bring fire to bear upon the canal crossings at the eastern side of the village. At 11.30 a.m. 14 tanks of B Battalion (6th Division) arrived in Marcoing. One of these climbed on to the railway embankment, and from that point of vantage silenced with its 6-pdrs. much of the sniping

[1] The battery belonged to the *108th F.A. Regt.* (*54th Div.*).

[2] Remnants of the *90th Res. Regt.* which had been holding the left sector of the *54th Div.* north of la Vacquerie.

[3] The *54th Div.* had ordered the bridge to be blown at 12.15 p.m., according to German accounts.

Digitized by Google

fire coming from the houses. An hour later a company of the 9/Suffolk (71st Brigade) entered the village, and with infantry available a house-to-house clearance began and a number of prisoners were collected. The staff of the *387th Landwehr Regiment* had departed hurriedly, and the papers they had left behind were secured. The tanks of A Battalion were withdrawn from Marcoing about 12.45 p.m.

Seventeen tanks of H Battalion (6th Division), of which three were knocked out by gun-fire on the way, had started for Nine Wood. The wood was important, for from its position at the end of the Premy Chapel ridge it commanded Noyelles half-a-mile away in the valley below, just as the Premy Chapel buildings overlooked Marcoing. The tanks began to arrive at Nine Wood about 11.45 a.m., but it was 1 p.m. before all were on the ground. They suppressed some infantry resistance at Premy Chapel and patrolled the slope between Nine Wood and Marcoing, knocking out with their fire machine guns in action on the edge of the village. Only the rides and the outer edges of the wood could, of course, be patrolled, but few Germans were discovered.

The advance of the three battalions of the 18th Brigade (6th Division),[1] to secure the Premy Chapel ridge as the left flank of the III. Corps, had been somewhat delayed by lack of information about the progress of the battle.[2] The 1/West Yorkshire, which led the brigade, skirted the eastern side of Ribécourt and crossed the railway north-east of the village at 10.50 a.m. Following close behind the 71st Brigade, which arrived upon the second objective about 11 a.m., the leading company of the battalion emerged from the trenches of the Hindenburg support system ten minutes later. Another company, on its left, topped the Premy Chapel ridge to come into view of a field howitzer battery, which swung its guns and opened direct fire. Without hesitation the company charged with the bayonet and captured the guns. The West Yorkshire were soon consolidating their position with two companies on the forward slope of the ridge and two in reserve. Casualties amounted to fourteen, the prisoners to 74.

[1] The fourth battalion, 11/Essex, had taken part in the earlier fighting, attached to the 71st Bde.

[2] It took 80 minutes for the news of the capture of the first objective to reach the 18th Bde., although a liaison officer was attached to the 71st Bde. in order to expedite reports.

Digitized by Google

The 2/Durham L.I. had been working its way through the western portion of Ribécourt and climbing the Flesquières ridge beyond. It came under machine-gun and rifle fire from the direction of Flesquières, where the 51st Division was held up, and as the two leading companies continued their advance towards the Hindenburg support system they found men of the 1/6th Gordon Highlanders on the left, one platoon established in the front trench at the top of the hill. Reaching higher ground the left company of the D.L.I. was seen by the enemy, and drew the short-range fire of five field guns; these, however, were engaged by rifles and Lewis guns and charged, from the right flank, with the bayonet. A battery of six howitzers, farther in rear, was thereupon deserted by its detachments, bringing the number of guns captured by the battalion to eleven. Other batteries a thousand yards away were brought under long-range fire as they limbered up and withdrew. The D.L.I., who had lost 24 men, were now in their allotted position.

On the other flank the 14/D.L.I. with a total loss of seven men wounded, had come up into its place at Premy Chapel by noon.[1]

The Advance of the 29th Division
Masnières : Marcoing : Nine Wood

The 29th Division (Major-General Sir B. de Lisle) gave the order to advance at 10.15 a.m. by bugle-call. All three brigades were sent forward, not a single battalion being kept in reserve; but organized opposition was not expected, the operation being regarded as in the nature of a pursuit.[2] By pressing hard upon the retreating enemy it was generally expected that neither the passage of the canal nor the occupation of the Masnières—Beaurevoir line would offer any serious difficulty.

Under the orders of each brigade was a brigade of field artillery, sections of the 181st Tunnelling Company R.E. having been detailed to help the guns through the wire

[1] The prisoners taken by the brigade were survivors of the *27th Res. Regt.* and *387th Landwehr*, besides artillerymen of the *108th F.A. Regt.*

[2] For 29th Div. operation order see Appendix 12.

Digitized by Google

and over the trenches as the batteries moved up. The C.R.A. (Br.-General E. H. Stevenson) had under his command a 60-pdr. battery and a horse-drawn 6-inch howitzer battery.[1] Two field companies R.E., the 497th (Kent) and 455th (W. Riding), were made responsible for the preservation or restoration of all river and canal crossings from Masnières to Marcoing, inclusive.[2] The pontoon detachments of the three field companies R.E., augmented by six pontoon wagons of No. 3 Pontoon Park, were kept in reserve on the Fins—Gouzeaucourt road; it was expected that the need for them would not arise before the following day.

In common with all the infantry engaged the troops carried 170 rounds of S.A.A. per man, together with a flare and two Mills bombs; and three out of four either a pick or a shovel. After a particularly fatiguing move into the concentration area they had been under arms since 1 a.m., and when they had marched six miles to the old British front line their objectives were still four miles away. Yet if all were tired, all were in good heart and braced for a special effort.

The 88th Brigade (Br.-General H. Nelson) moved on Masnières by way of la Vacquerie valley, the 1/Essex, following the four tanks of A Battalion, acting as advanced guard. From artillery formation the battalion began to deploy on passing the Hindenburg support system and at once met opposition from a strongpoint. On the slopes of Welsh Ridge the tanks had run into a German field battery which they engaged at a range of 200 yards; although one gun was knocked out three tanks received direct hits and the fourth, which had passed by to a flank without perceiving the battery, developed engine trouble soon afterwards. Nevertheless the infantry captured the guns, and took 70 prisoners and two machine-guns in the strongpoint. These successful encounters delayed the Essex, whose task it was to cross the canal at Masnières, clear the village and establish a "bridgehead". They were overtaken on the

[1] At the end of the barrage programme the 29th Div. Heavy Artillery Group and the super-heavy guns and howitzers fired concentrations until 10.15 a.m. on Marcoing, 10.30 a.m. on Masnières, 11.30 a.m. on Rumilly, and until 11.40 a.m. on Lesdain, Crèvecoeur and les Rues des Vignes.

[2] See C.R.E. Instruction No. 1, Appendix 13.

Digitized by Google

right by the 4/Worcestershire which, as it came forward, passed through the troops of the 59th Brigade.[1]

The Worcestershire, whose right was to be established astride the Masnières—Beaurevoir line just clear of the eastern edge of Masnières, approached the canal at the bridges opposite the sugar factory on that side of the village and passed two companies across; but as soon as they reached the farther bank they came under heavy and accurate machine-gun fire and could make no more headway. One platoon of the battalion joined the 11/Rifle Brigade and the tanks already in occupation of les Rues Vertes. At about 12.40 p.m. a tank of F Battalion, to which clung a number of bombers of the Rifle Brigade, tried to cross the canal by the main bridge; but the structure collapsed and the tank become jammed between its two broken ends.[2] There was no other bridge by which a tank could cross and the renewed efforts of the infantry to force a passage were checked by heavy fire.

Time was passing and the Cavalry Corps was already on the move, the Canadian Brigade (5th Cavalry Division), which headed the column taking the Masnières route, having started from behind Gouzeaucourt at 11.40 a.m.[3] Before 2 p.m., Br.-General J. E. B. Seely, commanding the Canadians, arrived in les Rues Vertes, and conferred with Br.-General Nelson. The latter was under the impression that the tanks had crossed the canal and that his battalions, having followed, were now arriving on their objective. Consequently Br.-General Seely, whose squadrons were halted south-west of les Rues Vertes, sent back for the leading regiment, the Fort Garry Horse, to come on and continue the advance.

The 1/Essex had entered the village and the 2/Hampshire (rear battalion of the 88th Brigade) was arriving when the Canadians rode in about 2.15 p.m. It was now clear to all that the main bridge was broken and that the enemy in Masnières beyond the canal was maintaining a dogged resistance. The Hampshire were to have come up on the left of the Worcestershire in the Masnières—Beaurevoir line, Rumilly being the direction of their ultimate advance; soon, having discovered the lock about 300 yards south-east

[1] See page 65. The 59th Bde. had kept the 10/K.R.R.C. (less 2 coys.) and 11/K.R.R.C. in reserve.

[2] The crew of the tank managed to escape from it, although under fire at close range.

[3] See page 63.

Digitized by Google

of the bridges by which the Worcestershire had crossed, they began to pass over in single file, exposed to rifle and machine-gun fire. The leading companies established themselves on the right of the Worcestershire, whose commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel C. S. Linton, had been killed by a sniper.

The impatient Canadians seized upon the first crossing place which seemed possible for cavalry: the lock by which the Hampshire were trickling across the canal. A passage fit for mounted troops was made with the assistance of the local inhabitants and men of the machine-gun squadron. It seemed the best that could be done. At 3.30 p.m. B Squadron of the Fort Garry Horse began to cross; half an hour later it was assembled on the farther side of the canal and the ride for the ridge east of Rumilly began.

Soon after three o'clock, when a drizzling rain had begun to fall, Major-General W. H. Greenly, commanding the 2nd Cavalry Division which was now drawing near, rode into les Rues Vertes.[1] He conferred with the commanders of the 88th Brigade and the Canadian Cavalry Brigade. The brigade-major of the 88th Brigade, himself a cavalryman, expressed the opinion that it was not practicable for any considerable force of cavalry to pass over the marshy approach or to cross the canal at the lock used by the Canadian squadron; and Major-General Greenly felt constrained to agree. No officer present seemed to know of the bridge, some 1,600 yards south-east of the main bridge, which led to Mon Plaisir Farm. This was a wooden structure, hidden from fire and view and quite suitable for cavalry, but no reconnaissance had discovered it and no French inhabitant had mentioned it.[2]

[1] He had previously arranged with Major-General H. J. M. Macandrew, commanding the 5th Cav. Div., that if the necessity arose he would take the Canadian Cav. Bde. under his command. Both divisions were using both routes of advance, Masnières and Marcoing, and Major-General Macandrew was on the Marcoing road. See page 78.

[2] It should certainly have been known to the commander and the brigade-major of the 88th Bde. for the bridge is indicated clearly by its map co-ordinates in 29th Div. O.O. No. 167 (reproduced as Appendix 12) in the paragraph dealing with the advance of the 88th Bde. after the cavalry had passed through.

On the British 1 : 20,000 map, which was issued to the staffs of cavalry divisions the existence of a bridge is indicated by a rough road running south from the farm and continuing on the opposite bank. The bridge is very clearly marked on the 1 : 10,000 map; it could also be seen in an air photograph taken on 19th Sept 1917, but this photograph was not sent to the Cav. Corps. See also Note at end of Chapter II.

Digitized by Google

At 3.30 p.m. Major-General Greenly issued the following order to the Canadian Cavalry Brigade:

> Your brigade will assist the infantry by holding Masnières as a bridgehead and will also send troops to close the gap which at present exists between the left of the 11/Rifle Brigade and the right of the 88th Brigade. You will keep forward reconnaissance to make certain that no opportunity of pushing through mounted is missed.

The passage of the Fort Garry Horse across the canal was to be stopped and any (mounted) troops on the north bank were to be recalled.

Major-General Greenly explained that he made these decisions on the grounds that there was not sufficient daylight left for the cavalry to co-operate, and that, as the infantry had not reached the Masnières—Beaurevoir line, the necessary preliminary to any large-scale cavalry action was lacking.

Messengers despatched to recall B Squadron of the Fort Garry Horse failed to overtake it. As will be seen, it did return but not till after darkness had fallen. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade remained outside les Rues Vertes, whilst in rear was halted a long column of horsemen, guns and vehicles which stretched back towards la Vacquerie.

Meanwhile the left battalion of the 88th Brigade, the R. Newfoundland Battalion, had overcome considerable opposition between the Hindenburg support system and the canal. In a number of encounters the covering fire of rifles, Lewis guns and Stokes mortars had enabled the Newfoundlanders to close with and to rout the enemy; although casualties had been suffered the passage of river and canal was made at the appointed place on the westward outskirts of Masnières.[1] After pushing forward right-handed up the spur on which Rumilly stands the battalion came into view of the Masnières—Beaurevoir line, which appeared to be fully manned. The direction of the advance was now almost due east, for the Newfoundlanders were to reach the objective on the left of the Hampshire, their own left on the Masnières—Cambrai road; but with no artillery or tank assistance the assault of a double line of

[1] Some delay was caused by machine-gun fire from a tank in which was discovered the sole survivor of the crew, maddened and half-blinded by his wounds, firing indiscriminately.

Digitized by Google

trenches protected by wire offered no chance of success. The companies dug in where they lay, forming a defensive flank to face the hostile trenches.

Until darkness fell[1] the Essex made gallant but unavailing efforts to force the passage of the canal and clear the enemy from Masnières. Such footbridges as existed were under heavy fire from snipers and machine guns, which could not be located with sufficient accuracy to be suppressed. Here again artillery support was badly needed.[2]

During the early hours of the night the survivors of the squadron of Fort Garry Horse, three officers and 30 others, came back across the canal in two parties, bringing nine prisoners with them.[3] The squadron had ridden north-eastward at a gallop after passing through a gap in the enemy's wire cut by our infantry, but came at once under fire which killed the squadron commander. South-east of Rumilly, after cutting a passage through a camouflaged road, the squadron charged a battery, killing or capturing the gunners. Disorganized infantry parties were overtaken and attacked as they retreated. At length, having suffered some forty casualties from machine-gun fire, the Canadians occupied a sunken road about 1,200 yards east of Rumilly, where they stayed until dark. Two messengers were despatched with reports of the situation, and both arrived safely. After nightfall the horses were stampeded in order to distract the attention of the enemy whilst the survivors withdrew on foot; and on the way back several parties of Germans were surprised and dispersed.[4]

At 10 p.m. Br.-General Nelson, commanding the 88th Brigade, placed all troops north of the canal (2/Hampshire, two companies 4/Worcestershire, one company 1/Essex) under the command of Lieut.-Colonel K. A. Johnston (2/Hampshire) and directed him to organize an attack on

[1] The sun set at 4.3 p.m.

[2] The XV. Bde. R.H.A., which was under the orders of the 88th Bde. had found its passage down the road from la Vacquerie blocked by tanks which had become ditched. The batteries which had reckoned to come into action by 11.30 a.m. did not reach their forward positions, some 3,000 yards S.W. of les Rues Vertes, until the afternoon when communications had yet to be established.

[3] They used the lock crossing which had served for the advance of the squadron. Here a portable bridge, provided by the Cavalry Corps and conveyed on two tanks, was now in position.

[4] For his gallant and enterprising leadership after the death of the squadron commander Lieut. H. Strachan was awarded the V.C.

Digitized by Google

Masnières from the east in order to clear, before morning, all the houses up to the main Cambrai road. The 59th Brigade (20th Division) had ordered the 11/Rifle Brigade to push forward towards Crèvecoeur. This battalion, which had withdrawn its detachment from les Rues Vertes during the afternoon and established posts facing eastward from the canal up the slope of the Bonavis ridge, moved at 10 p.m. The Mon Plaisir Farm bridge, and also the lock crossing where the river passes under the canal, were secured without fighting; but the attempt of a patrol to enter Crèvecoeur was met by heavy fire and did not succeed.

The 87th Brigade (Br.-General C. H. T. Lucas), forming the centre of the 29th Division advance, was directed upon Marcoing by way of the Couillet Wood valley. Close behind the four tanks of A Battalion came the 2/S. Wales Borderers and the 1/K.O.S.B.; the 1/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers and the 1/Border Regiment followed 600 yards in rear. The leading battalions were to secure the crossings and form bridge-heads, the others would pass through to occupy the German trenches between the Masnières—Cambrai road and the canal bend south-east of Noyelles.

The left of the advance made better progress than the right, although delay occurred in negotiating Marcoing despite the fact that there was little opposition. At the western edge of the village the K.O.S.B. encountered some resistance, but, owing to the preliminary action of the tanks and the company of the 9/Suffolk,[1] no difficulty was experienced in passing one company across the canal by the main railway bridge once the battalion had pushed through Marcoing. Another company secured the crossing at the lock which led to the station; the others began a systematic clearance of Marcoing where two of the brigade tanks were held up by minor mechanical troubles. The tanks of B Battalion which had no orders to cross the canal, remained but took no further part.

Hard on the heels of the K.O.S.B. came the 1/Border Regiment. Two companies crossed the canal by the railway bridge, and one at the lock road leading to the railway station, a troublesome machine gun which threatened to check the movement being put out of action by the courage

[1] See page 66.

Digitized by Google

and enterprise of a non-commissioned officer.[1] At 12.30 p.m. the three companies, in position on either side of the station, were ready to advance upon their objective; but the first movement was greeted by heavy enfilade fire from the right where the enemy held a number of ammunition pits dotted about the lower slopes of the Rumilly spur. It became necessary to wait until the Inniskilling Fusiliers, on the right, could get forward and clear the pits.

The Fusiliers were following the 2/S. Wales Borderers. This battalion had been troubled by snipers in Marcoing Copse and welcomed the assistance of a tank to subdue machine-gun fire whilst passing three companies across the canal at the lock farther to the east. The Borderers were in position beyond the lock by 1.30 p.m. Later in the afternoon on their right flank they established contact with men of the R. Newfoundland Battalion (88th Brigade).

In the meantime two of the brigade tanks had crossed the canal at Marcoing and moved on Flot Farm, a defended locality which marked the north-western end of the brigade objective. They ran round the farm and back across the trenches, silencing some machine guns and firing upon Germans seen in the open. Then, at 2 p.m., the 7th Dragoon Guards, advanced guard of the Secunderabad Brigade (5th Cavalry Division), began to enter Marcoing.[2] The leading squadron crossed the canal, but came under machine-gun fire when near the railway station. There was no chance for mounted action here; all that the squadron could do was to supply the Border Regiment with a little additional rifle strength on its right flank.[3]

The 1/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers, with which was the remaining company of the Border Regiment, had followed the S. Wales Borderers across the canal by the lock east of Marcoing Copse under considerable rifle fire. At 2.30 p.m. the battalion advanced to the attack of the ammunition pits which were stubbornly defended by infantry and machine

[1] Sergt. C. E. Spackman, who worked forward alone across ground almost devoid of cover. He shot down the gun detachment one by one and, when he was near enough, rushed the gun and captured it. He was awarded the V.C.

[2] For the order of advance of the Cavalry Corps see page 78.

[3] Major-Gen. Macandrew, who was all for bold mounted action, expressed his displeasure when he heard that some of the 7th D.G. were fighting as infantry.

Digitized by Google

guns. The enemy wire was cut by hand; skilfully employed covering fire, combined with the use of the bayonet, then enabled the Fusiliers to fight their way forward, ably and most gallantly led by their commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel J. Sherwood-Kelly.[1] The Germans who stood their ground were killed or obliged to surrender, over fifty prisoners and five machine guns being taken. When, however, the leading companies approached the wire of the Masnières—Beaurevoir line it became obvious that the position was too strong to be attacked without due preparation.[2] Touch had been gained with the Border Regiment and attempts were made to co-ordinate an attack by the two battalions, but darkness was falling before tank assistance could be procured for the Fusiliers. It was therefore judged prudent to postpone the attempt and dig in for the night. This decision failed to reach the left company of the Border Regiment which advanced independently in the wake of a tank, entered the trenches south of Flot Farm, and only withdrew when ordered to do so, bringing back 19 prisoners.

Nearly an hour later the 5th Dragoon Guards (1st Cavalry Division) arrived.[3] This was the regiment selected by the division to advance east of the canal in the turning movement which was to capture Noyelles, Cantaing and Fontaine and then assist the IV Corps in its attack upon the Bourlon ridge. Obviously there was no chance of carrying out these orders until the 87th Brigade had secured its objective. When, soon after 4 p.m., one squadron crossed the canal and attempted to advance towards Flot Farm, it was checked both by fire and wire. As darkness fell the regiment was withdrawn west of Marcoing, but remained saddled-up all night.

Farther to the left the 86th Brigade (Br.-General G. R. H. Cheape) moved along the western slopes of the Couillet Wood valley to secure the German trenches on the near side of the canal from the bend south-east of Noyelles as far as, and including, Nine Wood. With the four tanks of A

[1] Lt.-Colonel Sherwood-Kelly was awarded the V.C.

[2] The attached brigade of artillery (XVII. Bde. R.F.A.) was by this time in position on the eastern slope of the Couillet Wood valley, 1,800 yards S.W. of Marcoing Copse.

[3] For the cause of the delay to the advance of the 1st Cavalry Division see next Chapter.

Digitized by Google

Battalion attached to the brigade the 16/Middlesex led the way, being directed on the wood where the tanks of H Battalion were awaiting the arrival of infantry. As the Middlesex approached many Germans who had remained hidden among the trees and undergrowth opened fire ; but the battalion, with the aid of its own tanks, soon suppressed all resistance. By 1.15 p.m. the position was occupied and the tanks of H Battalion, having " obtained a receipt for " the wood from the local infantry commander," withdrew.

The 1/R Guernsey L.I., which had recently joined the 29th Division and was in action for the first timee established itself by 2 p.m., on the left of the Middlesex, where it had taken some part in clearing the north-western portion of Nine Wood. The Channel Island battalion faced north and west, connecting with the troops of the 6th Division at Premy Chapel.

On the right rear of the Middlesex the 2/Royal Fusiliers had met with fire from the outskirts of Marcoing, and therefore assisted the K.O.S.B. of the 87th Brigade to clear a portion of the village. A hundred prisoners and some machine guns were taken. The battalion pressed forward between Nine Wood and the canal, and about 3.15 p.m. occupied the partially dug trenches which formed the objective. Almost at the last moment the Germans had blown a bridge which spanned the river, at this point 500 yards west of the canal. Beyond the canal lay the trenches of the Masnières—Beaurevoir line, well protected by wire, in a more advanced state of construction than those occupied by the battalion, and still held by the Germans. The left flank of the 87th Brigade was 600 yards in rear of the Fusiliers.

Noyelles, whose nearest houses were 300 yards in front, had already been entered by British cavalry. As we know, the 7th Dragoon Guards (5th Cavalry Division) had reached Marcoing at 2 p.m. and sent its leading squadron across the canal.[1] The next squadron was despatched northward towards Noyelles in an effort to find a way through the German defences. Some fire, neither heavy nor accurate, greeted this movement and about 2.45 p.m., the squadron galloped the village without suffering a casualty, capturing 15 Germans in the street and collecting ten more from various

[1] See page 74.

Digitized by Google

hiding places. The prisoners were brought back and handed over to the infantry.

The Royal Fusiliers now sent a patrol into Noyelles but, as the river bridges were broken, it was impossible to reach the canal bridge on the Cambrai road, 400 yards farther to the north-east. Towards 4 p.m. a company went forward to occupy the village, linking up on the western side with the 16/Middlesex which had received the assistance of the brigade tanks in subduing some machine guns in that locality.[1] The Fusiliers established posts at the river crossings, one in the village and one at a wooden bridge found intact in the grounds of the château. Farther back, to safeguard the right flank of the brigade, two strongpoints were constructed between the river and canal. The squadron of the 7th Dragoon Guards remained with the battalion.

The rear battalion of the 86th Brigade, the 1/Lancashire Fusiliers, had orders, if necessary, to " mop up " Marcoing ; but there was little to do in the village, so, during the afternoon, a position was consolidated behind Nine Wood to strengthen the left flank of the brigade. Brigade headquarters took over the accommodation vacated by the *387th Landwehr Regiment* in Marcoing.[2]

Not long after 3 p.m. the 4th Dragoon Guards (1st Cavalry Division) began to approach Nine Wood, somewhat cautiously as the impression prevailed that fighting in this vicinity had not yet ended. The regiment formed the spearhead of the cavalry turning movement along the western side of the canal which was to assist the IV. Corps in its attack upon the Bourlon ridge. The first objective, Cantaing, could be seen dimly through the mist and fine rain when, at 4 p.m. the two leading squadrons were sent forward, one towards Cantaing and one to the woods called les Vallées half-a-mile north of Noyelles. The advance against Cantaing was hampered by wire and checked by the fire of machine guns ; but two troops galloped as far as la Folie château, beyond les Vallées wood, cutting down a German detachment on the way. Prisoners were taken at the

[1] After performing this service the tanks were " released " and rallied under the Premy Chapel ridge.

[2] The attached artillery brigade (XVI. Bde. R.H.A.) had reached a forward position on the western side of Couillet Wood valley, 3,300 yards S.W. of Nine Wood.

Digitized by Google

château and then, as enemy infantry were advancing through the woods in rear, a withdrawal was carried out. During this movement the squadron commander was killed.

Whilst this cavalry action was proceeding General Byng was holding a telephone conversation with Lieut.-General Woollcombe. He told the corps commander that, as Cantaing was empty, a cavalry brigade, not more, should be sent into the village at once and patrols pushed out well in advance.[1]

The 4th Dragoon Guards, which had lost two officers, 13 other ranks and 30 horses, took up position for the night east of Nine Wood to strengthen the line of the 86th Brigade. One troop had entered Noyelles and remained there.

Movement of the Cavalry Corps

Mention must now be made of the main body of the Cavalry Corps. The 5th Cavalry Division (Major-General H. J. M. Macandrew) had saddled up at 8.50 a.m. in readiness to move forward from its assembly area near Fins where corps headquarters were situated. The division advanced at 12.5 p.m., the Canadian Cavalry Brigade[2] taking the route to Masnières by way of la Vacquerie valley whilst the Secunderabad and Ambala Brigades, with the remainder of the divisional troops marched *via* Villiers Plouich and Couillet Wood on Marcoing. Passage through the Hindenburg trenches presented little difficulty, the wire-dragging tanks and the various parties employed on the track having done their work well.[3]

Major-General W. H. Greenly had started for Masnières at 2.8 p.m. when his 2nd Cavalry Division, which had already moved forward from Villiers Faucon, received the order to advance. The 4th Cavalry Brigade followed the

---

[1] The information about Cantaing was contained in a R.F.C. report timed 1.40 p.m., which had been telephoned by IV. Corps to Army at 3.20 p.m. The report may well have been true at the former time as troops of the *107th Division* did not arrive until later. See Note at end of Chapter VI.

[2] B Bty. R.C.H.A., No. 4 Motor M.G. Bty., troop 5th Field Sqdn. R.E., pack section Canadian field ambulance, light section ammunition column, attached.

[3] Chiefly cavalry reinforcements previously organized and trained for pioneer work.

Digitized by Google

main body of the 5th Cavalry Division towards Marcoing, whilst the 5th and 3rd Cavalry Brigades took the Masnières route.

In the rear of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade moved the Lucknow Brigade (Br.-General M. F. Gage), under the orders of the III. Corps. It had sent forward patrols as early as 6 a.m. to keep in touch with the infantry advance towards Crèvecoeur, and a fresh patrol was despatched at 2.0 p.m. to see if it were possible to cross the canal in the vicinity of the village. Reports showed, however, that the crossings had not yet been secured, so the brigade continued its progress at the tail of the column making for Masnières.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*)

20TH NOVEMBER (*concluded*)

(Sketches 1, 3, 5, 6)

THE DELAY TO THE 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION[1]

The 1st Cavalry Division (Major-General R. L. Mullens), under the orders of the IV. Corps, was to assist the second stage of the corps advance by turning the villages of Noyelles, Cantaing and Fontaine from the east, with tank co-operation, and then to play its part in the attack upon the Bourlon ridge. Its route lay by Ribécourt, along Grand Ravin under cover of the Premy Chapel ridge to the low ground beyond Nine Wood whence the turning moment would begin. If, however, the 51st Division made good progress, it was the intention of Major-General Mullens to launch his leading brigade across the ridge west of Premy Chapel so that it could advance direct upon Cantaing. This was understood by the 2nd Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General D. J. E. Beale-Browne)[2] which, with the 5th Dragoon Guards of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, formed the advanced guard.

At 11.35 a.m. the brigade received the information that Flesquières was captured,[3] and the order to push on *via* Trescault to Flesquières; the message added that the "main road *via* Ribécourt might also be available". The 4th Dragoon Guards, advanced-guard regiment, had already been received with a certain amount of fire as it approached Ribécourt and came to the conclusion that the fight for the village was not yet over. The leading squadron halted on the southern edge with the remainder of the regiment under cover a mile farther west, and the situation was reported to Br.-General Beale-Browne. He received at the same time (11.55 a.m.) another order from the 1st Cavalry Division: the brigade was to push forward "through the

[1] See Sketch 3.

[2] Section 2nd M.G. Sqdn., section H Bty. R.H.A., field troop R.E., pack section cavalry field ambulance attached.

[3] See IV. Corps message to 1st Cav. Div., page 63.

Digitized by Google

" second objective ". His liaison officer then informed him that the capture of Flesquières was in doubt.

The remainder of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade was now at Trescault, the 1st Cavalry Brigade south of Trescault, and the 9th Cavalry Brigade near Metz. Progress was not easy for there was a variety of battle traffic using the road and the squadrons could make no deviations on account of the standing wire. Advanced headquarters opened at Bilhem (Trescault) about 11.30 a.m. The composite company of tanks from B Battalion, detailed to co-operate with the division, was assembled in readiness on the slopes of Grand Ravin about half-way between Ribécourt and Marcoing.

Br.-General Beale-Browne had lost no time in ordering the 4th Dragoon Guards to send a squadron forward in the direction of Flesquières to clear up the situation. This was done, and it soon became certain, beyond all doubt, that Flesquières was still in German hands. At 1.30 p.m. the liaison officer with the 86th Brigade (29th Division) returned to report that the advance on Nine Wood was going well; thereupon Br.-General Beale-Browne ordered an immediate move forward along the route originally laid down. By 2.15 p.m. the brigade was passing south of Ribécourt without mishap, the 4th Dragoon Guards being followed by the 5th Dragoon Guards. As we have seen, the leading squadrons of these two regiments attempted to advance northward from Marcoing and Nine Wood on either side of the canal. The attention of the brigade was thus centred upon its original task; and although orders were sent for it to take part in an improvised operation to clear the enemy from Flesquières these orders arrived, in any case, too late to be acted upon.[1]

The main body of the brigade halted about 3.15 p.m. under cover of the Premy Chapel ridge about half-a-mile west of Marcoing, ready to support the leading regiments, and made no further movement. The 1st Cavalry Brigade stayed at Trescault and the 9th Cavalry Brigade at Metz. The leading regiment of the division had arrived at Nine Wood so late in the afternoon that the employment of the tanks was not even considered. No orders were sent to the tank company

[1] The 1st Cav. Div., at the instance of the IV. Corps, ordered the 2nd Cav. Bde. at 2.45 p.m. to move over the Premy Chapel ridge, work round N.E. of Flesquières and capture Orival Wood. This message reached the brigade at 4.30 p.m.

Digitized by Google

ready and waiting in Grand Ravin, and touch was not established with it until after darkness had fallen. Ready since noon, it knew its objectives and only required the word to advance.

Deadlock at Flesquières

The fight at Flesquières had continued throughout the afternoon, the Highlanders of the 51st Division persisting in their attempts to carry the village. Unfortunately no properly combined assault of tanks and infantry was organized. Several times the fire of such tanks as could be assembled silenced the Germans, but when the infantry advanced the tanks ceased fire at the critical moment, unaware that the effort was being made. Late in the afternoon, when the enemy's field guns were at last silenced or had withdrawn, six tanks succeeded in entering Flesquières. The Germans dived into dugouts and four platoons of the 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders (left battalion of the 152nd Brigade), supported by Stokes-mortar fire and rifle grenades, followed up as quickly as they could. But the tanks came out as the Highlanders went in, the defenders emerged from shelter and reopened fire, and those of our men who had entered the houses were forced to withdraw.

At about 4 p.m., however, the 1/7th Black Watch (left battalion of the 153rd Brigade) occupied Flesquières Trench west of the village, the Germans having vacated it.

The presence of the 6th Division on the Premy Chapel ridge and the advance, presently to be described, of the 62nd Division, on Graincourt obviously placed the defenders of Flesquières in danger of envelopment.[1] The 6th Division, whose total casualties had not much exceeded 450,[2] was well placed to initiate such an operation Troops of the 18th Brigade, indeed, were looking into the backs of the Germans in Flesquières at a distance of about a mile Neither trenches nor wire lay between; from Premy Chapel a sunken road ran straight into the village, and another such road, turning over the downs towards Graincourt, offered a covered line by which to cut off the enemy's retreat.

[1] The British position about Flesquières is shown on Sketch 5.

[2] The division attributed its low casualty list to the close co-operation between the tanks and the infantry, the latter never hanging back when the former tackled a centre of resistance.

Digitized by Google

Action was impeded by the long delay which had ensued before the situation became known to the headquarters of the 51st Division, three miles behind the old British front line, and to the IV. Corps. It was not until 12.45 p.m. that even the 152nd Brigade had definite information that Flesquières was still in German hands, and the news did not reach the IV. Corps for another hour.

Soon after 2 p.m. the 6th Division was asked by the III. Corps to see if a turning movement could be made in concert with the 51st Division. At 2.25 p.m. Major-General Marden was speaking on the telephone to Br.-General Craufurd, the commander of the 18th Brigade, whose headquarters, fixed for him in advance and affording no view of the battle, were situated 1,000 yards south of Ribécourt. Br.-General Craufurd did not regard the conditions as favourable: his only means of communication with his battalion commanders, 1,000 yards in front, was by runner; no tanks appeared to be available; and co-operation from the other flank seemed much to be desired.

Being under the impression that III. Corps co-operation had been definitely secured, the IV. Corps telegraphed at 2.30 p.m. to the 51st Division and 1st Cavalry Division informing them that the 6th Division would attack Flesquières from the direction of Marcoing: the 1st Cavalry Division was ordered to send at least two regiments to pass Premy Chapel " and get round the Flesquières position from " the north-east ", whilst the 51st Division attacked from the south.[1] At 4 p.m. the 51st Division ordered the 152nd Brigade to co-operate with the 6th Division attack which had not, in fact, been arranged.

Persuaded that no movement against Flesquières was advisable without an advance from the Graincourt direction the commander of the 1/6th Gordon Highlanders refrained from sending forward his two support companies through the 18th Brigade on his immediate right, although he discussed such a movement with Br.-General Craufurd. The 1/7th Gordon Highlanders, right battalion of the 153rd Brigade, heard from a patrol of King Edward's Horse[2] that the western side of Flesquières was held by no more than a few snipers and some machine guns; the battalion therefore

[1] As a result the 1st Cav. Div. issued the orders which reached the 2nd Cav. Bde. at 4.30 p.m. See page 81.

[2] IV. Corps cavalry regiment.

Digitized by Google

attempted to arrange an enveloping movement in concert with the 1/7th Black Watch on its left, but darkness was then approaching and the idea was abandoned when it was learned that a general attack would probably be delivered at dawn.

Thus at nightfall, the position of the 51st Division before Flesquières was much the same as it had been at noon.

Batteries of the 51st Division had moved forward in ample time to open a fresh bombardment of Flesquières provided that the tanks and infantry were warned. The failure to employ artillery support was mainly due to the difficulty of communication. Here, as in other parts of the field, visual signalling, except that of the Lucas lamp, was of little use ; tanks, cavalry, artillery wagons and limbers had wrought considerable damage to the telephone cables ; runners and mounted orderlies were too slow ; the pigeons were half-trained and felt the effects of the weather.[1]

The Advance Towards Bourlon

In the 62nd Division, on the left of the 51st, the task of the 186th Brigade (Br.-General R. B. Bradford, V.C.)[2] was to gain the line Graincourt—factory on the Baupaume-Cambrai road—Hindenburg support system on the spur east of Mœuvres—switch trench north of the Cambrai road —Canal du Nord bridge on road. In addition a detachment was to push out and occupy Anneux, whilst another captured the high ground west of Bourlon Wood to gain touch with the 1st Cavalry Division which was expected to be attacking from the east. Much, therefore, was expected ; whether it was too much depended to a great degree upon the character of the enemy's resistance and the success of the forces on the right.

The brigade, with the approval of Major-General Braithwaite and at the express wish of its commander who appreciated the value of time, moved off from its assembly position in Havrincourt Wood at 9 a.m. Attached were the 1st King Edward's Horse (less one squadron) and a company of tanks from G Battalion : their special mission was to seize certain bridges on the Bapaume—Cambrai road and

[1] It was afterwards reported that insufficient use was made of the wireless.

[2] Aged 25 years. The youngest brigadier-general in the British Army, he had assumed command on 10th Nov.

Digitized by Google

then to attack Graincourt. All other available tanks were to assist, acting independently, for attachment to particular units was deemed impracticable. An artillery barrage was placed across the Hindenburg support system, lifting forward according to a fixed time-table with which it was hoped the assault would be able to conform.

Three battalions, with the 2/6th Duke of Wellington's leading, advanced in succession, keeping Havrincourt on their left. The 2/5th moved west of the village. Near Havrincourt the 2/6th came under artillery fire from the direction of Flesquières, but reached its forming up line, on the second objective, in time to launch its attack at 11 a.m. Three companies tackled the Hindenburg support system, " leap-frogging " in turn, whilst the fourth cleared the area on the left as far as the Canal du Nord. Resistance was obstinate in places and the whole of the battalion's objective, including the trenches known as " Hughes Switch " and " Hughes Support ", which ran from the Hindenburg support system towards the canal, was not captured until 2 p.m. An advance of about 1,000 yards had been made ; prisoners amounted to 167, and a battery of 5.9-inch howitzers had been taken ; casualties numbered 81.

The 2/4th Duke of Wellington's followed the 2/6th past Havrincourt, then halted on reaching the railway to wait for the left of the 51st Division. The check to the Highlanders affected the right half of the battalion, but the companies on the left, protected from enfilade fire by the lie of the ground, continued to advance. They reached the neighbourhood of Graincourt without much trouble, then halted to await the arrival of the remainder of the battalion, their right being covered by patrols of King Edward's Horse. Attempts by the cavalry to penetrate between Graincourt and Flesquières were frustrated by machine-gun fire.

Br.-General Bradford, having come forward to keep control of the advance, ordered an attack on Graincourt by the two companies of the 2/4th Duke of Wellington's already in position, such tanks as were present to lead the way[1] Six tanks had already been put out of action by direct hits from two field guns at the edge of the village ; but three

[1] The fire of a heavy artillery group had been directed on Graincourt until 10.35 a.m.

Digitized by Google

fresh tanks, advancing by another route, knocked out the guns with their 6-pdrs. The infantry then swept through Graincourt and established posts on the far edge about 3.30 p.m. The two right companies of the battalion, having " side-slipped " to the left, were now coming up in rear.

On learning, about 1 p.m., of the check at Flesquières, Major-General Braithwaite had suggested to the 51st Division that the village might be outflanked by a movement through the area of his own division ; but no action was taken. Accordingly at 1.35 p.m. he issued an order forbidding any movement beyond Graincourt or to the north of the Bapaume—Cambrai road, enjoining close touch with the 36th Division west of the Canal du Nord, and directing all available tanks to be rallied and sent against Flesquières from the west.

If, as seems doubtful, Br.-General Bradford received this order he saw no reason why it should deflect him from the attack of his immediate objectives. He lost no time in pushing troops forward towards Anneux and to the factory buildings on the Cambrai road. Two squadrons of King Edward's Horse, followed by a company of the 2/6th Duke of Wellington's, approached Anneux, but the cavalry encountered wire on the outskirts of the village and then received machine-gun fire. As darkness was beginning to fall it was judged advisable to withdraw on Graincourt for the night. A company of the 2/4th Duke's secured the factory a little later than 5 p.m., after one platoon had fallen upon a column of 200 German infantry marching, all unaware, towards Cambrai. In the dark an officer and two others were seized from the tail of the column, and a burst of rifle and Lewis-gun fire killed 50 Germans and wounded 30 more. The 2/4th Duke of Wellington's had captured 150 prisoners and 11 guns. Casualties amounted to 53.

In the meantime the 2/7th Duke of Wellington's, inspired by a visit from the brigade commander, had passed through the 2/6th and continued the attack down the Hindenburg trenches. The few tanks proved their worth, but bomb and bayonet were needed to clear the numerous dug-outs, and " mopping-up " was not concluded in the area of the battalion objective, which included the trenches immediately west of the factory buildings, until 10 p.m. Farther to the left the 2/5th Duke of Wellington's had come up to continue

Digitized by Google

the attack from Hughes Support Trench. The advance of this battalion had not been untroubled. At the outset fire from a German strongpoint still unsubdued in the grounds of Havrincourt château had killed the commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel T. A. D. Best, and three other officers. The place was stormed and 60 prisoners with two machine guns captured; then, before the Hughes trenches were reached, the battalion came under fire from a point beyond Hughes Support. After a tank had assisted to deal with this opposition the leading companies formed up behind tanks for the advance upon the battalion objective, a trench beyond the Bapaume—Cambrai road between the Hindenburg support system and the Canal du Nord. At various points of vantage the Germans offered an obstinate resistance, but progress, if slow at times, was steady. When the task was completed in the gathering darkness prisoners amounted to 350; the casualties of the 2/5th Duke of Wellington's were 73.

The V. Brigade R.H.A. and the 310th Brigade R.F.A. had come into action in forward positions north-east of Havrincourt during the afternoon to cover the exposed right flank of the brigade. Captured German guns were used to shell the retreating enemy. Machine guns had proved difficult to transport, even by pack animal, but by nightfall many were in position on the new line. Seven were established for the defence of Graincourt and nine to cover the "factory" front".

If the 186th Brigade had not achieved the whole of its very heavy task it is true to say that, ably led, it had done all that was humanly possible.

West of the Canal du Nord the German resistance had stiffened when, about 11.30 a.m., the 9/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers (109th Brigade, 36th Division) took up the bombing attack northward along the trenches of the Hindenburg front system.[1] Enfilade fire from Hughes Support, not yet captured by the 186th Brigade, proved troublesome, and at noon a halt was called as the supply of bombs was running low. About 2 p.m. the attack was resumed, and at 3.30 p.m., after the 11th Battalion had passed through the 9th, the leading troops were up in line with the left of the 62nd

[1] See page 62.

Digitized by Google

Division beyond the Bapaume—Cambrai road. Over 500 prisoners[1] and many machine guns had been taken.

Beyond Boursies the 169th Brigade (56th Division) kept touch with the advance of the 109th Brigade, ready to join hands as soon as the final objective should be gained. At 9.15 p.m. three companies were holding a line of posts across No Man's Land north of the Bapaume—Cambrai road, but touch with the Ulstermen was not established until two o'clock next morning.

General Situation at Night[2]

The day was one of memorable achievement. On a front of over six miles an advance had been made varying from three miles to four. The two strong trench systems, covered by an outpost zone, which formed the Hindenburg Position had been carried in not much more than four hours, a rate of progress which was without precedent in the fighting on the Western Front. Moreover, heavy loss had been inflicted upon the Germans. By 6 p.m. the count of prisoners had reached 102 officers and 4,109 other ranks, and more were coming in; a hundred guns had been captured or destroyed. The cost in British casualties did not greatly exceed 4,000. It was a triumph for the new tactics which, combined with the secret and meticulous preparation made possible by admirable staff work and the whole-hearted co-operation of all ranks of all arms and services, had produced a surprise of a character well nigh irresistible. The unregistered bombardment of the artillery had done all that was claimed for it. The tanks had enabled the assault to burst without warning through un-cut wire, to over-run trenches, and to crush the well-sited strongpoints which linked up the whole powerful system of defence.

Yet the accomplishment had fallen far short of the intention. The offensive, successful in its first phase, instead of gathering momentum and sweeping forward to the anticipated victory had gradually exhausted its force and come to a standstill. The gap in the German defences from Masnières to Marcoing through which the cavalry were to

[1] Mostly of the *384th Landwehr Regt.*, holding the right sector of the *20th Landwehr Div.*, whose front extended to a point almost due west of Moeuvres.

[2] See Sketch 5.

Digitized by Google

have advanced beyond the St. Quentin canal had not been made ; more important still, the attack against the Bourlon ridge, the capture of which upon the first day the Commander in-Chief rightly set so much store, had not yet been delivered.

At night the right flank of the III. Corps, held by troops of the 12th and 20th Divisions, extended from the front line north-east of Gonnelieu along the Bonavis ridge and down the farther slope to the canal where, after the 11/Rifle Brigade had pushed forward, it rested half-a-mile from the canal at Crèvecoeur. Beyond the canal the 29th Division had troops on the bank in the neighbourhood of Masnières, where fighting continued for most of the night, and north-west of the village in the canal bend to a point south of Noyelles ; but nowhere had a firm footing been established in the Masnières—Beaurevoir line. On the near side of the canal Marcoing had been captured and also Noyelles[1] and Nine Wood, the left of the 29th Division linking up with the 6th Division at Premy Chapel. Holding the left of the III. Corps position the 6th Division had forward posts on the far slope of the Premy Chapel ridge, and was in touch with the right of the 51st Division of the IV. Corps which still rested in the front trench of the Hindenburg support system before Flesquières. Thence the line ran almost due north, where the 62nd Division faced eastward through Graincourt to the Bapaume—Cambrai road. Beyond the road the 62nd faced north in touch on the left with the 36th Division which was making contact with the 56th, the forward line now meeting the old British front near Boursies.

There was little rest for the tired troops who, in the rain and the darkness, had to consolidate their positions and reorganize in preparation for fresh efforts. The battalions of the 29th Division which lay close against the Masnières—Beaurevoir line with the canal at their backs were clearly in a most unsatisfactory situation ; and the reduction of the German salient marked by Cantaing—Flesquières—Anneux was obviously an immediate task. In some parts of the forward line there was no lack of troops, but the III. Corps had no fresh infantry in reserve. The IV. Corps had moved the 107th and 108th Brigades of the 36th

[1] Over one hundred French inhabitants had been evacuated from Noyelles and 414 from les Rues Vertes.

Digitized by Google

Division to the vicinity of Havrincourt for the night, and the 154th Brigade of the 51st Division, which had not yet been engaged, was clear of Metz with two battalions forward in the old British front line. Otherwise the nearest reinforcements were represented by the 40th Division, of Lieut.-General E. A. Fanshawe's V. Corps, in the Haplincourt—Rocquigny area about eight miles back from Havrincourt. Of the five divisions of cavalry only a few squadrons had been engaged.

The losses of the tanks had been somewhat severe.[1] During the afternoon and evening companies and battalions collected at their rallying points: I. Brigade on the north-eastern side of Havrincourt; II. Brigade on the south side of Grand Ravin, half-a-mile east of Ribécourt; III Brigade on the northern slope of the Bonavis ridge between the Hindenburg front and support systems. Companies and sections required to be reorganized, the machines refilled and overhauled, and the crews rested for at least some hours before the tank units could be considered fit for further action.

The night was a busy and harassed one throughout the captured area, for signal communications required repair, improvement and extension, whilst the depth of the advance and the formidable nature of the defences which had been over-run entailed an immense amount of work on the forward roads and tracks. Despite their utmost exertions the field companies and other R.E. units, pioneer battalions and labour contingents were taxed far beyond their powers. More men, more material and more transport were required. Meanwhile, through rain and mud and darkness artillery had to be moved forward and ammunition and supplies sent up by wagon, limber, pack or carrying party along difficult and precarious routes often crowded with troops of all arms.

The Commander-in-Chief had undertaken to inform General Pétain by noon whether the success achieved was great enough to permit of the movement of French troops

[1] The number of fighting tanks (378 were available but not all were used) put out of action was 179: 65 by direct hits, 71 by mechanical troubles, 43 by ditching or other causes. In D and E Battalions operating with the 51st Division (Flesquières) no less than 28 tanks were hit by artillery fire.

Digitized by Google

into the battle area.[1] Precise information concerning the progress of the right flank thrust towards Crèvecoeur, where the chief interest of the French lay, proved difficult to obtain by the appointed hour, but at 1 p.m. General Pétain was informed that no forward move was yet advisable. At 4.30 p.m. Sir Douglas Haig visited General Byng at Albert and discussed the situation.[2] Reports now showed that the way for the cavalry advance was not yet cleared, nor was it likely to be without considerable fighting on the morrow. It was agreed with General Degoutte, who was also in Albert, that there was still no scope for the action of French troops and that, having detrained at Péronne, they should remain there. At 5.30 p.m. Sir Douglas Haig sent a personal message in the above terms to the French Commander-in-Chief.

Foreseeing that his resources would be heavily taxed, the Field-Marshal had already telegraphed to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff asking that the two divisions (four had already gone) which were under orders for Italy might be left at his disposal. He approved of General Byng's determination to make another thrust on the morrow before the German reinforcements gathered: the Bourlon ridge would be the chief objective, but an effort was to be made to secure the Masnières —Beaurevoir line from Marcoing to Crèvecoeur so that the cavalry might go through.

Third Army orders for the 21st November, issued at 8 p.m. were as follows :[3]

III. Corps to " make every effort " to gain the Masnières—Beaurevoir line east of Marcoing and Masnières and to capture Crèvecoeur so as to allow of the early passage of the cavalry ;

IV. Corps, after capturing Flesquières that night, to push on and take Bourlon " the capture of which at an early hour " tomorrow is of paramount importance " ;

Subsequent tasks for both corps to be as originally ordered ;[4]

---

[1] See page 24.

[2] On the previous day the Commander-in-Chief had moved from Montreuil to G.H.Q. Advanced Operations Centre at Bavincourt (10 miles S.W. of Arras) which remained open until 3rd Dec.

[3] See Sketch 5.

[4] See Appendix 1.

Digitized by Google

Cavalry Corps to cross the canal as early as possible, using all available bridges, and carry out its original instructions ;[1]

R.F.C. to assist by low-flying attacks upon the Rumilly and Bourlon positions ;

V. Corps, in reserve, would probably not be required to move before noon.

Anxious to afford the IV. Corps all the tank assistance possible, the Army, at 9 p.m., ordered the II. Brigade to be transferred to that corps from the III. Corps, the tanks of A Battalion with the 29th Division and those of B Battalion with the Cavalry Corps to be withdrawn as soon as possible.[2] It was explained that the tanks still with the III. Corps were intended for two main operations, the capture of the Masnières—Beaurevoir line and the seizure of Crèvecoeur, and the " minimum number considered necessary to ensure " success " was to be employed. Wire-pulling tanks were to revert to their brigades and become fighting tanks.

The III. Corps at 10 p.m. ordered the 29th Division, assisted by 12 additional tanks from the III. Brigade to capture the Masnières—Beaurevoir line as far east as Crèvecoeur, whilst the 20th Division, also with 12 tanks from the III. Brigade, pushed along the near bank of the canal to seize the bridges at Crèvecoeur and join hands there with the 29th Division ; the two divisions were to agree upon a suitable zero hour. As soon as the objectives had been secured the Lucknow Brigade would cross the canal and sweep southward ; No. 59 Squadron R.F.C. would assist the whole operation with low-flying attacks.

The 20th Division, which proposed to employ the 59th Brigade, arranged with the 29th Division that the attack should be delivered at 11 a.m.

The IV. Corps had announced as early as 6.45 p.m. that the advance upon the Bourlon ridge would be continued on the morrow,[3] and gave as preliminary tasks the " clearing " up " of the Flesquières position by the 51st Division and, by the 1st Cavalry Division, the capture of Cantaing and the cutting off of the hostile batteries believed to be still in

[1] See Appendix 2.

[2] The tanks of B Battalion, attached to the 1st Cav. Div. and not used on this day, were in reality already at the disposal of the IV. Corps.

[3] At this time the corps was under the impression that the 62nd Div. held Anneux.

Digitized by Google

position near Orival Wood. Detailed orders were sent out at 1.0 a.m. on the 21st November :

The 51st Division was to capture Flesquières at daybreak and continue its advance to the Premy Chapel—Graincourt road, which would be the starting line for its main attack at 10 a.m. with Fontaine as the principal objective.

The 62nd Division, with the co-operation of the 1st Cavalry Division, was made responsible for the capture of Bourlon Wood and village, its advance to start in conjunction with that of the 51st Division at 10 a.m.

The 1st Cavalry Division would follow up and carry out its original mission as soon as the infantry had taken Bourlon.

About twenty-five tanks from the I. and II. Brigades, Tank Corps, were allotted to the 51st and from fourteen to twenty from the I. Brigade to the 62nd Division which was also given one cavalry regiment ; two 9.2-inch howitzers, one 6-inch howitzer and two 60-pdr. batteries would bombard Cantaing ; all available artillery would support the main attack.

Special instructions were given to the 36th Division, which was to seize the crossings of the Canal du Nord from Sains to Moeuvres, occupying both these villages and also Inchy. This was to be accomplished by an attack of two brigades from the east " as soon as Bourlon Wood and village have " been captured ", and by the advance northward to Moeuvres of one brigade along the Hindenburg trenches west of the canal. Moeuvres was to be occupied at dawn if, as was considered possible, it had been evacuated by the Germans.

Meanwhile, at 7.15 p.m. on the 20th, the 51st Division had issued orders for the capture of Flesquières by a dawn attack, to be followed by the advance from reserve of the 154th Brigade which, at 10 a.m., was to assault the Cantaing —Bourlon Wood trenches as its first objective. At 10 p.m. the orders of the 62nd Division reached the 186th Brigade, which was to continue to lead the advance of the division. In addition to the tanks, it would have the assistance of a regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division.

In none of the corps was it easy to re-organize and prepare for these operations : communications were unreliable ; the darkness, the rain and the mud made movement slow and

Digitized by Google

difficult; and the various divisional headquarters had insufficient knowledge of the condition of the forward troops and were not always well-informed as to their precise location.

At 5.30 p.m. a telephone message from the Army had suggested to Lieut.-General Kavanagh, commanding the Cavalry Corps, that if he were "satisfied that no more could "be done to-night", he might withdraw his divisions to their assembly area, leaving out the necessary patrols. This suited the cavalry view, as the water supply in the forward areas was limited—to water animals at the canal would have been a hazardous proceeding—and there was the possibility that if the divisions remained on the forward slopes they would come under shell fire when day broke. After another consultation with the Army at 6 p.m. it was decided to withdraw, "if possible", the 5th and 2nd Cavalry Divisions to the Villers Faucon—Fins area. Orders to this effect were issued soon after 6.30 p.m., when it had been ascertained that the 29th Division needed neither the Canadian Cavalry Brigade behind Masnières nor the Secunderabad Brigade at Marcoing. At 8.45 p.m., however, the Army order for the 21st reached the Cavalry Corps, which thus learnt that its leading divisions must be ready for action next day. The withdrawal orders were therefore cancelled, the majority of the units being stopped as they were moving back. Of the column on the Masnières route, the Canadian Cavalry Brigade bivouacked for the night 1,000 yards south of Marcoing Copse; the 5th Cavalry Brigade north-east of la Vacquerie; the 3rd Cavalry Brigade 1,000 yards east of Good Man Farm; and the Lucknow Brigade north of la Vacquerie. In the Marcoing column the Secunderabad Brigade lay on the south side of the Couillet Wood valley between the Hindenburg front and support systems; the Ambala Brigade near Good Man Farm; and the 4th Cavalry Brigade, which completed its backward march, arrived at 1.30 a.m. at Villers Faucon, in its original assembly area.

The Subsidiary Operations 20th November[1]

On either flank of the offensive the remainder of the Army front sprang into activity at zero hour. Special artillery

[1] See Sketch 1.

Digitized by Google

bombardments formed the main feature of these operations, but every available means was employed to pin the Germans to their ground, and, for as long as was possible, to keep them in doubt concerning the scope and character of the main attack.

South of the III. Corps an artillery bombardment, with discharges of smoke, had opened at zero hour along the whole of the ten-mile front held by the VII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. D'O Snow). On the extreme right, near Pontruet, guns of the French 5th Division joined in. Near the flank of the main attack a special concentration was put down upon the German batteries in the area of La Terrière (2½ miles S.S.E. of Banteux). The fire of these guns had been drawn by a feint attack, with dummy figures[1] on the front of the 55th Division (Major-General H. S. Jeudwine), holding the left sector of the VII. Corps. G Special Company R.E. discharged 1,320 gas drums against the Honnecourt Wood area (2 miles south of Banteux) and targets at another point a mile farther south.[2] A mile to the south again an infantry attack, originally planned for an earlier date, was carried out by the 55th Division.

Here the 164th Brigade (Br.-General C. I. Stockwell) assaulted the German line marked by two prominent features, " The Knoll " at the northern end of the objective, and Gillemont Farm at the southern end almost opposite the centre of the corps front. It was the intention to secure the enemy's front trench for a distance of 1,600 yards and part of his support line. At zero hour the British barrage came down, and the 1/4th King's Own attacked the farm two minutes later. The Germans fought stoutly in their shattered trenches, but, in spite of persistent counter-attacks, by 11.15 a.m. the King's Own held 500 yards of the front line and 200 yards of a communication trench. The position was a precarious one, for under a precipitous slope beyond the farm the enemy could collect unseen and immune from shellfire. At 6.24 a.m. the 1/8th King's (Liverpool Irish) and 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers attacked

[1] The use of dummies to simulate an infantry attack was first practised at Loos in 1915 (see " 1915 " Vol. II. p. 181). Great ingenuity was subsequently displayed by the R.E. in developing the idea, the silhouettes, placed in irregular ranks and manipulated by wires, presenting a most convincing appearance when viewed through a film of smoke at a few hundred yards' distance. Dummy tanks were built of canvas.

[2] German stretcher-parties were seen, later, to be very busy.

Digitized by Google

the Knoll, leaving a gap on the right of 650 yards which was to be closed by the King's and King's Own working towards each other along the German trenches. The King's, however, were caught by the German barrage and encountered uncut wire, their attack failing completely. On their left the Fusiliers, whose outer flank was protected by a barrage, including smoke, stormed the front trench and began to bomb up the communication trenches; but the German counter-attacks proved too strong, and at 8.25 a.m. the order to withdraw was given. Eventually the King's Own at Gillemont Farm, being counter-attacked with great persistence, found the odds too great and a withdrawal was completed by 1 p.m. The 164th Brigade lost 34 officers and 569 other ranks in this affair, the enemy, who was by no means taken by surprise, also suffering many casualties.[1]

On the front of the 24th Division (Major-General A. C. Daly), holding the right sector of the VII. Corps, Q Special Company R.E. discharged 200 blazing oil drums into Quennet Copse, about a mile south of Gillemont Farm. North-east of Hargicourt the 2/Leinster (73rd Brigade) raided the German trenches and demolished two dug-outs, the defenders running away. A raid of the 9/E. Surrey (72nd Brigade) east of Hargicourt resulted in sharp fighting, and a similar enterprise of the 8/Queen's (also 72nd Brigade) east of Villeret killed some Germans[2] and yielded two machine-guns. South-east of Villeret another of the feint attacks with dummies drew heavy and persistent artillery and machine-gun fire; six fougasses were exploded successfully a mile farther south, and opposite Bellenglise Bangalore torpedoes and bomb-throwers provided another diversion.

The artillery on the corps front continued to engage selected targets at intervals throughout the day. There is no doubt that the enemy batteries were kept fully occupied, and, up to the 23rd November, only one battalion from the German divisions opposite the VII. Corps was identified in the main battle.[3]

[1] Twenty-three prisoners of the *184th Regt.* (*183rd Div.*) were brought back from Gillemont Farm.

[2] *440th Res. Regt.* (*183rd Div.*).

[3] Rupprecht stated that he did not attach any special importance to the VII. Corps attack at Gillemont Farm and the Knoll nor to the VI. Corps attack at Bullecourt described below.

Digitized by Google

On the other flank of the offensive, where the 56th Division (Major-General F. A. Dudgeon) held the left of the IV. Corps, No. 1 Special Company R.E. had fired gas drums into the Quéant salient at 2 a.m. When the rapid bombardment, with smoke, opened along the whole divisional front at zero hour the appearance of dummy figures and canvas tanks at various points so deceived the Germans that they shelled some of them until noon. At 8.30 a.m. the enemy blew up the Bapaume—Cambrai road bridge over the Canal du Nord, which was unwelcome news to the IV. Corps and the Army, this road being counted upon as the principal supply and reinforcement route for the northward advance.[1]

Next on the left, in the sector of the VI. Corps (Lieut.-General J. A. L. Haldane) No. 3 Special Company R.E. put down a special smoke bombardment along the whole front at zero hour; Q Special Company R.E. discharged 300 gas drums into the Riencourt area east of Bullecourt and 75 at the German trenches south-west of Fontaine-lez-Croisilles; and J Special Company R.E. fired 500 south of Chérisy and 500 west of Vis-en-Artois. But the important operation was the assault of Bovis and Tunnel trenches by the 3rd (Major-General C. J. Deverell) and 16th (Major-General W. B. Hickie) Divisions.[2]

The supporting artillery consisted of 102 18-pdrs., 33 4.5-inch howitzers, 39 6-inch howitzers, and two 12-inch. Fifty-four trench mortars were employed and most of the machine guns in the corps.

In front of Bullecourt the 9th Brigade (Br.-General H. C. Potter) of the 3rd Division had 800 yards of Bovis Trench for objective. The attack was made at 6.28 a.m. On the right the 12/W. Yorkshire met little opposition, but the 1/Northumberland Fusiliers on the left had a sterner task; many counter-attacks were delivered and about 4 p.m. the left company was driven back. It was hoped to pinch out the area on the immediate left of the brigade, where the German trenches were overlooked from both flanks; and here the 16th Division filled the gap by a "dummy" attack behind a special smoke screen.

The objective of the 16th Division was Tunnel Trench, extending for 1,800 yards almost to the Sensée river, with

[1] A bridge to take 17-ton axle-loads was eventually built in two nights, day work being impossible.

[2] See Sketch 6.

Digitized by Google

part of Tunnel Support. On the right the 6/Connaught Rangers and 1/R. Munster Fusiliers of the 47th Brigade (Br.-General G. E. Pereira) were successful although a bombing counter-attack afterwards regained some ground on the outer flank. In the centre the 10th and 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers of the 48th Brigade (Br.-General F. W. Ramsay) took the Germans by surprise so that many ran forward to surrender. On the left the attack of the 49th Brigade (Br.-General P. Leveson-Gower) made by the 2/R. Irish and the 7th/8th R. Irish Fusiliers was also successful, although the Fusiliers had to repulse several counter-attacks. The gallery under Tunnel Trench, reported by prisoners taken previous to the attack to be prepared for demolition, was saved by the 174th Tunnelling Company R.E. which obtained possession and removed the charges after several underground encounters with the enemy.

Prisoners amounted to 718, representing all three regiments of the *240th Division*; and it was reckoned that nearly 500 Germans had been killed. The losses of the 3rd and 16th Divisions were 805.[1]

The XVII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Charles Fergusson) on the extreme left next to the First Army,[2] fired gas shell into a German trench east of Monchy at 3.0 a.m. and discharged gas from projectors against selected points in Pelves and, north of the Scarpe, against the Roeux chemical works. At the general zero hour a smoke screen was put down along the whole front of the corps and the 1/R. Warwickshire (4th Division) carried out a raid south-east of Monchy, killing some Germans and blowing up two dug-outs.

NOTE

The Germans on the 20th November[3]

German accounts admit the completeness of the surprise at zero hour and the confusion and local panics which ensued. They also speak of the feeling of helplessness which possessed their infantry, called upon to face a tank onslaught with which they

[1] Subsequently, on the night 24th/25th Nov. the 16th Div. completed the capture of the right of its objective, including the *Mebu* called "Jove"; and on the following night the 3rd Div. extended its gains on either flank.

[2] See Sketch 1.

[3] Mainly from Rupprecht, Ludendorff, Moser, Tankschlacht and various regimental histories.

Digitized by Google

did not know how to deal. Crown Prince Rupprecht, commander of the Northern Group of Armies of which the *Second Army* formed the left, remarked upon the deep penetration of positions which, being of special strength, were thinly manned by troops of indifferent quality with relatively little artillery to support them. He was surprised at the speed of the tanks and still more at the ease with which they negotiated the formidable German wire.

The heavy mist hampered defence measures and made it difficult for the higher commanders in rear to discover the strength of the British and the extent of their success. There was only one flight of fighter aeroplanes on the Cambrai front and the pilots were attacked by the R.F.C. about 6.30 a.m. just as they were about to take off, despite the thick mist which had kept the Germans on the ground for ten days.[1]

Ludendorff states that a continuation of the attacks in Flanders and from the French front was expected when the blow at Cambrai fell as a surprise. Soon after 8 a.m. he learnt by telephone as much of the situation as was known at the headquarters of the *Second Army*, and promptly ordered reinforcements from north and south. Rupprecht found him, on this and succeeding days, somewhat querulous on the telephone: he alleged slackness and lack of precaution, "all eyes being on Flanders". But it was agreed that the *Second Army* must restore the situation by a counter-stroke, Rupprecht and O.H.L. providing reinforcements for the purpose.

The situation grew worse as the morning wore on, so that the Germans were forced to contemplate a general destruction of the canal bridges and a hurried and extensive withdrawal. The *54th Division*, including its artillery, was almost destroyed[2]; the *20th Landwehr Division* and the *19th Reserve Regiment* (*9th Reserve Division*) were in little better case; the camp commandant from *54th Division* headquarters with three officers and 30 men, none of whom had been in the line for two years, was sent to hold the canal crossings between Marcoing and Masnières; eastward from Masnières to Crèvecoeur the Masnières—Beaurevoir line was, for several hours, absolutely undefended, presenting a gap of a mile. Then, early in the afternoon, in the face of this great opportunity, the British effort began, surprisingly, to slacken.

During the morning the infantry of the *107th Division*[3] was hurried forward through the mist by battalions and smaller

[1] See "The War in the Air" Vol. IV. p. 232.

[2] 5,785 officers and men were reported missing at the end of the day. "Regt. No. 84" states that the regimental commander was killed and the three battalion commanders killed or wounded.

[3] See page 48. Those of its batteries already in action had suffered severely.

Digitized by Google

groups. The units had no knowledge of the ground nor of the German defensive system. They did not know where they would make contact with the British. In the afternoon the *52nd Reserve Regiment*, which had received orders to counter-attack and recapture Flesquières with two battalions, got one battalion into the half-completed trenches between the Bapaume—Cambrai road and the southern edge of Cantaing which was also occupied; the *232nd Reserve Regiment* had one battalion facing Noyelles between Cantaing and the canal, whilst another, following in rear, reached Flot Farm later and established a small bridgehead opposite Noyelles; and on its left the *227th Reserve Regiment* manned the Masnières—Beaurevoir line as far as Masnières with two battalions, the third having been sent to Crèvecoeur. There was a general shortage of gun and small-arms ammunition, and a clamour for armour-piercing ammunition for use against the tanks.

Between Moeuvres and Bourlon Wood the German line was strenghtened in the evening by the *III/77th Regiment* and the *II/92nd Regiment* drawn from the *20th Division* ("Arras Group") next on the west; on the other flank of the "break-in", as it may well be called, the *183rd Division* (left division of the "Caudry Group") sent up a battalion of the *440th Reserve Regiment*. Many battalions in rest behind other parts of the front were ordered to Cambrai during the day, some being brought by road—there was a shortage of motor transport—and some by rail. From the "St. Quentin Group" came the *I/128th*, *1/175th*, *I/261st Reserve*, and *II/82nd Landwehr*; the *Sixth Army* sent the *III/1st Guard Reserve* (*1st Guard Reserve Division*) from Lens and the *III/13th Bavarian* (*6th Bavarian Division*) from the Loos sector. None of these battalions actually came into action on the 20th.

Time was needed to bring up whole divisions by train—Ludendorff reckoned that sufficient troops to maintain an adequate defence could hardly be assembled before the 23rd—but the *119th Division* (*Fourth Army*) from Flanders, the *30th Division* (*Seventh Army*) from the Aisne, and the *214th Division* (*Sixth Army*) from the Douai area were all ordered to entrain at once. According to Moser the last-named division began to arrive on the front near Moeuvres before the end of the day.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

The Battle of Cambrai, 1917 (*continued*)
21st November
(Sketch 7)
The Fighting on the St. Quentin Canal:
III. Corps Reverts to the Defensive

Along the St. Quentin canal the events of the night and of the early morning of the 21st November centred upon Masnières, where a company of the 2/Hampshire with one of the 4/Worcestershire (Br.-General Nelson's 88th Brigade, 29th Division)[1] was working in the darkness through the village from the eastern side in order to clear the Germans from the houses as far as the main Cambrai road. The task was accomplished by 4.30 a.m.—except for a party of the enemy who held out in the "catacombs" of the church until noon—and patrols were then sent forward towards the Masnières—Beaurevoir line. Later, when it was getting light, the two companies advanced and, in spite of heavy machine-gun fire from the higher ground in front of Rumilly, occupied the trenches upon a frontage of 200 yards, the left resting upon the Rumilly road. Another company of the Hampshire was then moved up to fill a gap, and the gain was somewhat extended. By 4 a.m. two companies of the 1/Essex had been passed across the canal at the lock west of Masnières, but they were prevented by machine-gun fire from crossing the Cambrai road and linking up with the other advance. They dug in along the railway near the canal.

In the early hours of the morning, which brought more rain, patrols of the 88th Brigade had explored the canal bank eastward from Masnières and at dawn obtained touch with men of the 11/Rifle Brigade (Br.-General Hyslop's 59th Brigade, 20th Division) at Mon Plaisir Farm, which was found to be untenanted by the enemy.

On the near side of the canal, to the right rear of the 29th Division, the 20th Division launched an attack at 6.30 a.m. from the Bonavis ridge, three weak companies of the 10/Rifle Brigade advancing against les Rues des Vignes. They

[1] See page 72.

Digitized by Google

reached the canal-lock crossing, but the Germans remained in the northern end of the village and two of the companies were withdrawn later to the slopes in rear in order to escape envelopment; the third company remained near the lock which was commanded by the machine-guns of both sides.[1]

North-west of Masnières in the bend of the canal the 87th Brigade (Br.-General C. H. T. Lucas) of the 29th Division had spent the night, almost undisturbed in consolidating its position. The 86th Brigade (Br.-General G. R. H. Cheape) had driven off several enemy patrols which tried to enter Noyelles where, at 5 a.m., a dismounted troop of the 18th Hussars arrived to relieve the party of 4th Dragoon Guards holding posts on the edge of the village. By some misunderstanding the posts were vacated too soon and the enemy seized the opportunity to occupy them.

About 10.30 a.m., when, as will be seen, the enemy launched his attack upon Noyelles, lines of German infantry, estimated at two battalions, were observed advancing from behind Crèvecoeur towards Mon Plaisir Farm. This attack, if attack were intended, came under the fire of machine guns covering the front of the 88th Brigade and was caught by a barrage put down by the XV. Brigade R.H.A. No German got within 500 yards of the British position. Br.-General Nelson's battalions, however, were in no condition to take part in the combined attack of the 29th and 20th Divisions which had been fixed for 11 a.m.,[2] and the rest of the day was spent in consolidation. After darkness had fallen part of the 1/Essex was moved up to a position facing the Masnières—Beaurevoir line east of the Cambrai road on the left of the Hampshire. The Newfoundlanders who had, originally, been ordered to move round to the sugar factory to support the 11 a.m. attack were put into houses at Masnières for the night and designated "counter-attack "battalion".

The Canadian Cavalry Brigade (5th Cavalry Division), being still near at hand, had lent machine guns to assist the

---

[1] The *19th Res. Regt.* (*9th Res. Div.*) having collected and reorganized the men of its scattered and depleted battalions, was defending les Rues des Vignes and Revelon château, the right sector of the division whose boundary was now the western edge of Crèvecoeur. In reserve were the *I/261st Res. Regt.* and the *I/128th Regt.* Farther south the *395th Regt.* held a bridgehead at Vaucelles on the Péronne road.

[2] See page 92.

Digitized by Google

88th Brigade in repelling the German movement of the morning. As a precaution, in the afternoon, Br.-General Seely placed the Royal Canadian Dragoons in position east of the Péronne road facing les Rues des Vignes, with a troop of Lord Strathcona's Horse covering the lock-crossing east of Mon Plaisir Farm, and four machine guns of that regiment at the farm bridges which were covered by B Battery, R. Canadian H.A.

In the combined attack at 11 a.m. the 88th Brigade was to have captured the Masnières—Beaurevoir line from the main Cambrai road for a distance of 2,000 yards towards Crèvecoeur, sending patrols along the far side of the canal to link up with the 59th Brigade (20th Division) at the Crèvecoeur bridges. The 59th Brigade did not know of the 88th Brigade's inability to participate, and ordered the 11/K.R.R.C. to advance eastward and secure the bridges, an enterprise which, under the circumstances, stood little chance of success. Considerable delay ensued owing to the late arrival of the section of tanks, supplied by F Battalion (III. Brigade), which did not receive its orders at the brigade rallying place until the appointed zero hour. About 1.20 p.m., without tank support, the 11/K.R.R.C. passed through the forward posts of the 11/Rifle Brigade and advanced eastward towards Crèvecoeur, soon coming under enfilade fire from the Masnières—Beaurevoir line. In an effort to work along both banks of the canal, the left company was sent across to the farther side at the lock where the river passes underneath; but the whole battalion swung left-handed to face the hostile fire. A halt was called in order to reorganize and regain direction, and soon after 3 p.m. the advance was resumed towards Revelon château. Four tanks now came through, passing north of the château; two made for each bridge, and parties of the enemy fled before their fire. As night was coming on and the infantry were not in sufficient strength to take part in forcing the bridges,[1] the tanks then withdrew and the 11/K.R.R.C. established a post in Revelon château. This post was withdrawn later owing to heavy fire from some adjacent farm buildings which were still in German possession.

[1] The tank commanders were doubtful if the bridges would bear the weight of a tank.

Digitized by Google

About 4.30 p.m. a company of the 10/K.R.R.C. had rushed the south-western part of les Rues des Vignes and got into touch with the company of the 10/Rifle Brigade still in position near the lock crossing. After dark, however, it was judged prudent to withdraw both companies to the slopes above the village.[1] On the other flank of the brigade the company of the 11/K.R.R.C. was brought back across the canal.

In the bend of the canal east of Marcoing the 87th Brigade was also to attack at 11.0 a.m.; its objectives were those of the previous day, and the assault was to be carried out by the 2/S. Wales Borderers and 1/K.O.S.B., covered by the attached artillery, the XVII. Brigade R.F.A. More tank assistance was forthcoming than had been allotted. A battalion commander, who did not know that ten tanks of F Battalion were expected, secured the services of the section of A Battalion which had been attached to the 86th Brigade. The 87th Brigade also retained its own section, so that 18 tanks were now warned to take part. Their assembly took more time than had been allowed, and the infantry had to wait until noon when the machines moved forward from Marcoing station, the only place where they could cross the canal.

Most of the tanks worked laterally along the German trenches and wire instead of leading the infantry in a frontal assault, a change of tactics which in some cases prevented the infantry from following close enough to benefit from the first onset. Nine tanks of F Battalion started and five of them, with four of A Battalion assisted the S. Wales Borderers on the right; four others and four more of A Battalion attacked towards Flot Farm in advance of the K.O.S.B. Everywhere the machines were received with terrific machine-gun fire, and it soon became only too clear that the plate of the Mark IV. tank was not proof against the German armour-piercing bullet. Also, a number of enemy field guns were firing over open sights. For more than two hours the tanks cruised among the German trenches, but they could not subdue the machine-gunners who took refuge in dug-outs and seized their chance to emerge and open fire upon tanks and infantry alike. The infantry had little success in its frontal assault against wire

[1] Before the retirement our men made an unsuccessful effort to destroy the bridge, a permanent iron structure, 20 feet wide.

Digitized by Google

which was mostly intact. On the extreme right the S. Wales Borderers managed to enter some houses on the Cambrai road and to retain possession of them in spite of a resolute counter-attack. An attempt by a party of the 1/Essex (88th Brigade) to assist by advancing up the road from Masnières did not succeed. Elsewhere the Welshmen, like the K.O.S.B. on their left, could do little and at 3.30 p.m., when the fighting died down, most of the two battalions were back at their starting line.[1]

The tanks of F and A Battalions were, in the words of one commander, " badly mauled ". Only three were lost, two by direct hits from enemy field guns and one which reached Rumilly was stranded there, and remained in enemy hands ; but several had been set on fire and many were holed by armour piercing bullets.[2] These and splinters caused many casualties to the crews, and put out of action a considerable number of Lewis guns.

During the day the 455th (W. Riding) Field Company R.E. made a thorough reconnaissance of Marcoing where two engineer dumps were discovered. The Germans had left behind, also, machine-gun limbers, trench mortars and four anti-aircraft guns. In a starch factory was a well-fitted cinema hall and theatre, and a baths establishment in good order was found. The canal, but not the railway, had been used for transport.

The enemy was not disposed to leave Noyelles in the hands of the 86th Brigade. The first attack came at 10.30 a.m. and fighting continued until at 12.15 p.m. the Germans put in fresh troops.[3] The 2/Royal Fusiliers, whose Stokes guns proved their worth, and the party of 18th Hussars were hard pressed ; and, although two platoons of the 1/Lancashire Fusiliers were sent up, the enemy penetrated to the centre of the village. On the eastern side the 9th Lancers (Br.-General Beale-Browne's 2nd Cavalry Brigade), which had orders to push patrols northward along the canal in order to cover the flank of the 1st Cavalry Brigade operating

[1] The opponents of the 87th Bde. were the *III/1st Guard Res. Regt.* and, on its left, the *III/13th Bavarian Regt.*

[2] In most cases three or four holes were made ; but one tank reported 37 through its 8-mm. armour and in another the 12-mm. plate of the sponsons was pierced. Reports said " The present armour plate is either " bad material, or the enemy is using a better A-P. bullet."

[3] *The I/232nd Res. (107th Div.)* bore the brunt of this engagement.

Digitized by Google

towards Cantaing,[1] found that mounted action was impossible. Early in the afternoon a squadron was sent on foot to the river bridge in the château grounds where it was just in time to repulse a German attack. With the support of another squadron, it then held the crossing. At 4 p.m. two tanks,[2] with "mopping-up" parties of Royal Fusiliers and 18th Hussars, drove the Germans out of the streets of Noyelles.

On the western side of the village the 16/Middlesex were hotly engaged at intervals during the morning and lost ground. A position at some cross-roads on the north-western side changed hands several times, and it was not until the afternoon that it finally passed into the possession of the Middlesex.

Beyond Nine Wood the R. Guernsey L.I., left battalion of the 86th Brigade, had repulsed by fire an attack from the north at 8 a.m.

The third regiment of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, the 4th Dragoon Guards, remained in reserve, but at 1.30 p.m. Br.-General Beale-Browne thought it advisable to ask for reinforcements. During the afternoon the 15th Hussars was sent up from the 9th Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General D' A. Legard) which had reached Ribécourt by midday. One squadron was sent to the 9th Lancers in Noyelles château grounds; it was not engaged, but the regiment, together with the other regiments of the 9th Cavalry Brigade (19th Hussars and Bedfordshire Yeomanry), at night replaced the 2nd Cavalry Brigade which withdrew to Ribécourt.

At 12.5 p.m. the 6th Division had received orders from the III. Corps to relieve the 86th Brigade when night fell, and this was accomplished by Br.-General H. A. Walker's 16th Brigade with less trouble than might have been expected. Some of the troops of this brigade, notably one company of the 1/Buffs, had assisted in clearing the last of the Germans from Noyelles. The battalions of the 86th went into billets at Marcoing.

At 2.30 p.m. the Army reported to G.H.Q. that the III. Corps "was believed to be in possession of the Masnières "—Beaurevoir line, but not Rumilly": efforts were being

[1] See below.

[2] From the contingent of B Battalion which had come under the orders of the 1st Cav. Div. on the previous day.

Digitized by Google

made to clear that village " so as to allow the cavalry " through". A little later in the afternoon, however, General Byng's headquarters came to a much better appreciation of the course of events upon the corps front. The French were then informed that there would be no opportunity for them that day, and at 3.10 p.m. Major-General Vaughan, Chief of the General Staff of the Third Army, discussed the situation by telephone with Lieut.-General Pulteney commanding the III. Corps : the enemy's resistance east of the canal appeared to be stiffening and it seemed that a further advance might be out of the question as the troops were very tired and no reinforcements were in sight ; it was advisable to select and prepare a strong defensive line overlooking the canal crossings, as the ground held east of the canal might prove untenable in the face of a strong counter-attack ; the bridges should be prepared for demolition.[1]

Yet hope died hard at Army headquarters, for at 6 p.m. the III. Corps received a telegram which ordered an effort to be made on the morrow " to complete the capture of " Rumilly," whilst the Cavalry Corps was instructed to keep one division in the Masnières—Marcoing area to carry out its original task if the opportunity arose. Then, at 8.50 p.m., Major-General de Lisle, commanding the 29th Division, reported to the corps that his three brigades were very tired and unfit to attack the Masnières—Beaurevoir line on the morrow unless an effective three hours' artillery bombardment could be arranged and twenty tanks provided. Finally General Byng, who was now acting on the decision of the Commander-in-Chief,[2] spoke to Lieut.-General Pulteney at 10.30 p.m., agreeing that there was " very little chance of " breaking through ", and confirming the defensive proposals which had been discussed in the afternoon. There would be no attempt to take Rumilly.

The III. Corps, which had already issued a warning with regard to defensive preparations, at once sent out a formal order which may be summarized as follows :

Divisions will consolidate all ground gained with a view to meeting counter-attacks ;

---

[1] Accordingly, at 5 p.m., the Chief Engineer III. Corps ordered the 29th Div. to prepare for demolition all the bridges on its front. The Germans had already blown the canal bridge at Noyelles.

[2] See page 115.

Digitized by Google

6th Division will establish a well-wired line of resistance from Nine Wood, inclusive, to canal south of Noyelles with an outpost line north of Noyelles (16th Bde.). Touch to be gained with 51st Division (IV. Corps) at a point mid-way between Noyelles and Cantaing ;

29th Division will make every effort to strengthen its present position north and east of Masnières (88th Bde.) and across the canal bend (87th Bde.). Bridges will be prepared for demolition, the Masnières bridges to have precedence over those at Marcoing.

The Cavalry Corps had experienced another day of uncertainty. At 2.20 p.m. the 5th Cavalry Division, nearest the canal, was ordered to lend the Ambala Brigade to the 1st Cavalry Division, engaged under the IV. Corps ; and at 5 p.m. the division was informed that it would stay in its forward position for the night as reserve to the infantry.[1] The Army order for active operations on the 22nd was received at midnight and cancelled by telephone half an hour later : the division was now to withdraw to the Fins area where it would receive back the Ambala Brigade. The 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades of the 2nd Cavalry Division, having saddled up at 6.15 a.m., had received orders in the afternoon to move back to Villers Faucon where, as we know, the 4th Cavalry Brigade had returned on the previous night. As for the 4th Cavalry Division, it had moved forward to the Fins area, arriving at 11.20 a.m. In the afternoon the Lucknow Brigade, from the III. Corps, was ordered to rejoin it.

IV. Corps : The Attack Towards Bourlon Resumed

During the night of the 20th/21st November, patrols of Br.-General Beckwith's 153rd Brigade (51st Division) had discovered that Flesquières was clear of the enemy.[2] The brigade, and also the 152nd Brigade (Br.-General H. P. Burn) on its right, advanced about 6 a.m. under a " light " barrage "[3] and occupied the village, thus completing the

[1] The dispositions of the Canadian Cav. Bde. have already been mentioned. See page 102.

[2] According to Tankschlacht the defenders, amongst whom the *II/27th Res.*, *387th Landwehr*, and the *84th Regt.* were represented, besides the *108th Pioneer Coy.* and some artillerymen, withdrew in the small hours on being informed that no support could be given them.

[3] Since the previous night the 51st Div. had had one F.A. brigade in Grand Ravin, two in No Man's Land, and one in its original position.

Digitized by Google

capture of the original second objective. At 7.5 a.m. the divisional artillery began a bombardment of the Premy Chapel—Graincourt road, and 25 minutes later the rear battalions[1] of the two brigades came through the leaders to continue the advance. There was very little opposition, and by about 9 a.m. the Highlanders were in possession of the road, having collected 70 prisoners and over-run 12 abandoned guns. On the extreme right an attempt of the Seaforth to push a party into Cantaing was foiled by machine-gun fire.

The Cantaing line, which ran from Nine Wood to Bourlon Wood and thus interposed between the 51st Division and Fontaine, the principal objective in the main attack, consisted of a double line of trenches, only spit-locked for the most part but with machine-gun emplacements and dug-outs completed. The wire was good. Cantaing appeared to be held in considerable strength.

The 154th Brigade (Br.-General K. G. Buchanan), which had not yet been engaged, was already moving up from the old British front line in order to attack at 10 a.m., the time appointed for the corps advance. The leading battalions, 1/4th Gordon Highlanders and 1/7th Argyll & Sutherland, halted near the Premy Chapel—Graincourt road to await the arrival of the tanks. The batteries of the LXX. Brigade R.F.A. came into action near Flesquières and one section of guns was pushed forward to a position almost in the starting line. Drizzling rain persisted, but the fact that visibility was bad was hardly to the disadvantage of the British, for the whole area was open to German observation from the Bourlon ridge.

Unfortunately it had proved impossible for the tanks to arrive at the starting line by the appointed hour. At 5.30 a.m. attack orders had reached the headquarters of the II. Brigade in Dessart Wood, six miles in rear of the point in Grand Ravin where the tanks of B Battalion were assembled; and orders were not received by the battalion until 9 a.m. At 10.30 a.m. Br.-General Buchanan decided to wait no longer and the advance began, supported by the fire of the forward section of field guns, effective so far as it went. But as the Highlanders neared the German trenches

[1] 1/5th Seaforth, 1/8th Argyll (152nd Bde.).
1/6th Black Watch, 1/5th Gordons (153rd Bde.).

Digitized by Google

they met with such a storm of machine-gun fire that the whole movement was checked.

In the meantime, at 9.40 a.m., the 1st Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General E. Makins)[1] began to leave Trescault and moved *via* Ribécourt towards Premy Chapel with orders to carry out the original plan of working northward east of Cantaing and Fontaine. The 2nd Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays) formed the advanced guard, and the leading squadron reached Nine Wood about 11 a.m. when the situation seemed extremely unpromising : sharp fighting was going on in Noyelles, and the advance of the 51st Division was held up before Cantaing. The Bays pushed patrols towards Cantaing, and I Battery R.H.A. came into action ready to open fire on the village.

Soon after mid-day, however, 13 tanks of B Battalion came roaring over the crest of the Premy Chapel ridge and made for Cantaing from the south-east. They were joined by the Bays, who moved on the left flank, and followed by a company of the 14/D.L.I. (18th Brigade, 6th Division). Two more companies of this battalion were presently led forward on the initiative of their commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel J. B. Rosher.[2] Tanks and cavalry broke into Cantaing where the Germans resisted stoutly, and the D.L.I. were soon involved in the fighting. The 1/4th Gordon Highlanders, right battalion of the 154th Brigade, then began to make its way in from the west and before 1.30 p.m. the whole village was in British hands. The 6-pdr. guns of the tanks had proved most effective, and one tank accounted for a pocket of very obstinate Germans on the north-western outskirts of Cantaing. Three tanks suffered direct hits and one of them was burnt out ; the other two were salved. Nearly 400 prisoners were taken[3] and the Gordons and Bays remained to consolidate and hold the village, the D.L.I. being withdrawn. Later, a squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards (1st Cavalry Brigade) came up to strengthen the defence.

The 1/7th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, left battalion of the 154th Brigade, had approached within 300 yards of the

---

[1] The brigade had despatched the 11th Hussars to the 62nd Div. See page 111.

[2] The first movement of the D.L.I. had been ordered for the purpose of filling a gap which had developed between the III. and IV. Corps.

[3] Mostly of the *I/52nd Res. Regt.* and *I/232nd Res. Regt.*

Digitized by Google

Cantaing line by noon when heavy enfilade fire from Cantaing mill and Bourlon Wood, made further progress impossible.[1] As it dug in the battalion was harassed by low-flying aeroplanes. It was about 3 p.m. when six tanks of H Battalion appeared and led the Highlanders into the German trenches, two companies of the support battalion, 1/4th Seaforth, coming forward on the right to seize Cantaing mill. Whilst this advance was in progress Major-General Harper issued orders that nothing further was to be attempted until the 62nd Division was in Bourlon; but the two battalions had no knowledge of this and followed four of the tanks towards Fontaine. On the way sharp fighting ensued, many Germans being killed or captured; and although the tanks came under artillery fire they entered and drove the enemy from Fontaine, handing over the village to the Argyll and Seaforth after nightfall. The 6-pdrs. had knocked out two German field guns which were firing from a depression south of the village, and another gun near Bourlon Wood.[2]

The 1/4th Seaforth and the 1/7th Argyll & Sutherland each had three weak companies in Fontaine, the Argyll being responsible for the defence of the western side, facing Bourlon Wood. The fourth company of each battalion, farther to the south-west, extended to the Cantaing line in touch with the 62nd Division.[3] On the other side of what was a very vulnerable salient a gap intervened between the Seaforth in Fontaine and the Gordons and Queen's Bays in Cantaing, about a mile in rear.

The 62nd Division, on the left of the 51st, still relied upon the 186th Brigade (Br.-General R. B. Bradford) to which was allotted 20 tanks, the 11th Hussars (from the 1st Cavalry Brigade) and two squadrons of King Edward's Horse. Its objectives included Anneux; the continuation of the Cantaing line in front of Bourlon Wood as far as the Crucifix (900 yards S.W. of Bourlon village); thence a line facing north-west to a point in the Hindenburg support system about six hundred yards from the Canal du Nord. When

[1] The Argyll were engaged with the left of the *III* and the right of the *I/52nd Res. Regt.* (*107th Div.*).

[2] Fontaine was held by part of the *II/52nd Res. Regt.* (*107th Div.*). The regimental history explains that the village was evacuated, under cover of heavy machine-gun fire, in the course of a general withdrawal to the "Wotan III" line running south from Sailly.

[3] See page 112.

Digitized by Google

this had been gained the defences of Bourlon village were to be carried from the west by an attack which would sweep through to the south-eastern edge. Anneux and the Cantaing line as far as a point 400 yards beyond the main Cambrai road were to be shelled for 20 minutes, beginning at zero hour and the guns were then to lift 400 yards; a bombardment of Bourlon, beginning also at zero, would last 50 minutes; and machine-gun barrages were to be laid on Anneux, in rear of the Cantaing line beyond the village, and on the high ground near the Crucifix.[1]

Br.-General Bradford used three battalions for the opening attack. The tanks, like those working with the 51st Division, had not been given sufficient time to get into action at 10 a.m.; but 19 of G Battalion (I. Brigade) were hurriedly collected and all but one eventually took part.

On the right the 2/4th Duke of Wellington's had to wait 20 minutes for the tanks, and the right company then moved on Anneux with two tanks making direct for the village and two on either flank. After a number of brisk encounters Anneux was entered and occupied;[2] but heavy blasts of machine-gun fire checked all attempts to continue the advance. The left company of the battalion had moved from the factory upon Anneux Chapel some fifteen hundred yards along the main Cambrai road. Machine-gun and rifle fire came from a quarry and a sunken road on the northern side, but with the help of the tanks all resistance was crushed and many Germans killed. This company of the Duke's arrived on the northern side of the road in the Cantaing line which afforded very little shelter from the fire of numerous machine-guns in Bourlon Wood; a withdrawal was therefore made to a sunken road 300 yards back. Anneux Chapel, together with the adjacent buildings and quarry, was captured by another company assisted by a tank.[3]

In the centre the 2/7th Duke of Wellington's advanced from the vicinity of the factory buildings at 10 a.m. without waiting for the tanks. Rapid progress was made as far as

[1] The 62nd Div. had much trouble in getting its field artillery forward; only one road was available and that, in places, was axle-deep in mud. Barrages were fired from back positions; the batteries were not all in action between Havrincourt and Graincourt before the afternoon.

[2] Anneux was held by a company of the *III/52nd Res. Regt.* (*107th Div*). According to the regimental history only 20 men got away.

[3] The Anneux Chapel position was defended by the *I/175th Regt.*

Digitized by Google

a sunken road about a thousand yards in front, although the enemy maintained a steady fire from Bourlon Wood; but the thick wire which lay ahead proved impossible to negotiate. Even with the tank assistance which was now forthcoming no more ground could be gained.

The 2/5th Duke of Wellington's, on the left, was faced with a particularly arduous task: owing to the westward trend, towards Moeuvres, of the Hindenburg support system a frontal attack meant advancing into a horseshoe where a number of strongpoints barred the way to the heavily wired main position. As no tanks arrived it was decided that a better chance of success was offered by a bombing attack along the Hindenburg support system, and this was started at zero hour. In spite of their obstinate resistance the Germans were pressed back steadily; and when at length the Duke's were checked, about 3.30 p.m., a tank appeared and helped to carry the advance forward. By nightfall the 2/5th was in possession of the Hindenburg support system up to a point about 700 yards east of the Canal du Nord. At 8 p.m. a determined counter-attack developed, but was broken up by rifle and Lewis-gun fire.

The 2/6th Duke of Wellington's, which had been kept in reserve until the time came to pass through the 2/7th and advance to the attack of Bourlon village, was brought up to fill a gap which existed between the 2/7th in the centre and the 2/5th in the Hindenburg support system on the left.

Br.-General Bradford's 186th Brigade had accomplished as much as could fairly be expected. Against an increasing resistance, with very little support, it had striven for an objective which might have taxed the powers of a fresh division.[1] The tanks, hurried into action at short notice without opportunity to reconnoitre or to arrange co-operation with the infantry, had given of their best. Penetrating much farther than the infantry, one tank had crushed a machine-gun nest at the Crucifix and others had entered Bourlon Wood.

The forward line of the 186th Brigade was taken over by the 185th Brigade (Br.-General Viscount Hampden) after dark, but the relief was a difficult one and no clearly defined position was occupied by the in-coming troops, some

[1] In two days' fighting the brigade had captured more than 1,200 prisoners and 38 guns.

Digitized by Google

of whom, indeed, were doubtful of the exact direction of the front.

The 36th Division now became responsible for the area between the Hindenburg support system (inclusive) and the Canal du Nord and during the night extended its front accordingly; but here also there was much disorganization and the forward posts in the Hindenburg trenches were not occupied. The 107th and 108th Brigades of the 36th Division had been waiting all day south-west of Graincourt. There was never any chance of their being able to reach the high ground west of Bourlon and launch an attack upon the crossings of the Canal du Nord from the east.

The cavalry also had had no opportunity for effective intervention. Moving up from Havrincourt, the 11th Hussars (1st Cavalry Brigade) was directed on Graincourt with orders to push patrols up the western side of Bourlon Wood. The regiment, unaware that the main attack was fixed for 10 a.m., arrived at Graincourt an hour and a half earlier to find the exits from the village swept by machine-gun fire from Anneux. One squadron was sent up, later, to the factory buildings on the Cambrai road, and in the afternoon the other two were moved forward to the vicinity of Anneux; but the whole regiment was withdrawn to Havrincourt at night. King Edward's Horse, waiting west of Graincourt, could do no more than provide mounted orderlies and send out a few patrols.

West of the Canal du Nord the attack of Br.-General Ricardo's 109th Brigade (36th Division) was delivered by the 9/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers, a smoke barrage having been placed in front of Moeuvres and another on Tadpole Copse. At first satisfactory progress was made and the southern part of Moeuvres was occupied; but, although the 10/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers and 14/R. Irish Rifles were engaged, the position gained proved untenable owing to machine-gun fire from the trenches west of the village and a heavy German bombardment. In the end the 109th Brigade could claim an advance of about half a mile. Keeping touch with the brigade, troops of the 56th Division worked northward up the German outpost line, but failed in an attempt to enter the Hindenburg front trenches south-west of Moeuvres.

Digitized by Google

The Decision to Go On

At 5.15 p.m. the Army had been able to give G.H.Q. a fairly clear idea of the progress made by the IV. Corps although it was still believed, as had been reported earlier, that Moeuvres was captured; and the news of the capture of Fontaine was not received at General Byng's headquarters until 7.15 p.m.

The Commander-in-Chief had now to decide whether the prospect of securing the Bourlon ridge—always of paramount importance in his eyes—justified a continuation of the offensive. He displayed no hesitation in closing down the III. Corps operations on the St. Quentin canal, for he had, from the first, regarded the advance eastward as primarily of value in safeguarding the flank of the northward thrust. This was the main effort which still held promise of a rich reward if it could be carried to a successful issue: British possession of the Bourlon ridge, as was well known to both sides, would constitute a serious menace to the German defences and communications northward and north-westward as far as the Sensée river. It also commanded the western approaches to Cambrai.

Unfortunately the attack of the IV. Corps had not fulfilled expectations; and the dawn of the 22nd November would see the expiration of the 48 hours which, it was estimated, must elapse before German reinforcements could arrive in strength. But it was believed at G.H.Q., on somewhat slender evidence, that the enemy was showing a disposition to retire, whilst the fresh troops he had already put into the battle were reckoned as no more than sufficient to replace his casualties.[1] Moreover the Third Army had not yet called upon the three divisions of the V. Corps; and in reply to his request of the previous day, Sir Douglas Haig had been informed by the C.I.G.S. that he might retain the

[1] Two German divisions, *54th and 20th Landwehr*, had, for the most part, been put out of action, together with one regiment of the *9th Res. Div.* Prisoners of all three regiments of the *107th Div.* were taken on 21st Nov. (*III/52nd Res.* and *II/232nd Res.* about Cantaing; *I/232nd Res.* at Noyelles; *227th Res.* near Rumilly) but no other complete division had been engaged. The other units identified were *385th Landwehr* (*20th Landwehr Div.*) south of Bourlon; *I/175th Regt.* (*36th Div.*) near Anneux; *III/1st Guard Res. Regt.* (*1st Guard Res. Div.*) north of Marcoing; and *III/440th Res.* near Rumilly.

By 6 p.m. the total of prisoners captured by the Army had risen to 159 officers and 7,316 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

two divisions which were under orders for Italy.[1] Another consideration was that the alternative to a further advance was a retirement. The forward positions of the IV. Corps lay under close observation from the Bourlon ridge and, as a defensive front, might be regarded as untenable. If the corps could not establish itself on Bourlon a withdrawal to the Flesquières ridge would be the wisest course.

Convinced, as he was, that to engage the Germans closely on the British front provided the most direct means of relieving the pressure on Italy, the Field-Marshal decided that the operations should continue, and informed Sir William Robertson accordingly.

Thus the British offensive, so ambitious in design, planned to disrupt the German defences and communications over a wide area, was now to be concentrated upon the Bourlon ridge rising steeply to the height of some hundred and fifty feet above the Bapaume—Cambrai road, its centre clothed in thick woodland six hundred acres in extent. Offering great advantages to the defence, it was held by a tenacious enemy who, as will be seen, only awaited the accumulation of sufficient forces to deliver a powerful counter-stroke. The cause of the Third Army's failure to seize its opportunity after an initial success unique in battles on the Western Front may be found partly in the defects of the original plan of exploitation and partly in the methods employed to carry it out. These matters will be considered at some length in a later chapter.

Fresh attempts to gain the Bourlon ridge could hardly succeed if they took the form of such feeble and ill-co-ordinated attacks as had been delivered by the III. and IV. Corps on the 21st November. Adequate artillery bombardment must precede a properly planned assault by sufficient forces of fresh infantry strongly supported by the other arms. It was unfortunate that the time needed for the mounting of such an operation would provide the enemy with a valuable respite which he would be sure to turn to good account.

[1] In agreeing to this course Sir W. Robertson had required two more divisions to be "ear-marked" for despatch to Italy later; these might be weak ones which could be brought up to establishment after their arrival in Italy.

Digitized by Google

At 10.45 p.m. General Byng, proceeding on the lines of the Commander-in-Chief's decision, gave verbal instruction on the telephone to Lieut.-General Woollcombe, commanding the IV. Corps: no tanks were available for the 22nd November, so the attack on Bourlon should not be pressed at the risk of heavy casualties; a bombardment should be opened and all preparations made for an advance upon the 23rd when the 40th Division would be available[1]; the units of the scattered 1st Cavalry Division should be relieved and re-assembled; the Marcoing—Cantaing line should be organized for defence and the forward troops distributed in depth.

The IV. Corps, however, in its orders for the 22nd issued at 11.50 p.m., hoped to push the left flank forward; for it was important to ensure that an advance over the western slopes of the Bourlon ridge should not be taken in enfilade or subject to counter-attack from the German defences (the "Wotan II" line) on the lower ground along the Canal du Nord.[2] As regards the vulnerable salient formed by the occupation of Fontaine, the corps considered that a further advance to the eastern shoulder of Bourlon Wood was now feasible: not only would the local situation be relieved thereby, but an important part of the principal objective would be secured. The tasks allotted to divisions were:

51st Division to establish a defensive flank Cantaing—Fontaine, to consolidate (with 62nd Division) the Cantaing line, and to occupy the high ground north of Fontaine;

62nd Division to consolidate its forward positions and to gain ground where possible;

36th Division to take over the Hindenburg support system from the 62nd Division[3] and continue its advance towards Sains and Inchy on both sides of the Canal du Nord;

56th Division to take over the Hindenburg front system, as soon as the 36th Division attack on Moeuvres had cleared

---

[1] The Army had ordered the V. Corps at 9.45 a.m. to move up the 40th Div. to the Hermies area, and, in the afternoon, decided to shift the Guards and the 59th Div. one stage nearer the battlefield: to Barastre and Achiet respectively. The 40th Div. was placed at the disposal of the IV. Corps from 8 p.m. on the 21st.

[2] The flank protection of the right of the corps, where the Germans held la Folie Wood, presented a similar problem but does not appear to have received the same attention.

[3] This was being done. See page 114.

Digitized by Google

sufficient space, to bomb along the trenches, and to capture Tadpole Copse;

Artillery arrangements to include the bombardment of Bourlon Wood and village preparatory to an attack later "when tanks are available".

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 21ST NOVEMBER[1]

It was not until the morning of the 21st that Rupprecht was aware of the real strength of the British forces engaged. At noon he ordered the canal crossings from Crèvecoeur to Banteux to be held at all costs. Anti-aircraft guns, mounted on lorries, were said to have done extremely well against the tanks, and the *Sixth* and *Fourth Armies* were consequently ordered to send all such weapons to the battle front. Afternoon reports suggested that the German infantry was fighting well, but, owing to lack of troops, no counter-attacks would be possible before the 23rd November. By the evening Rupprecht reckoned that the equivalent of four divisions, besides the two "smashed up" divisions, were in the line between Moeuvres and les Rues des Vignes. Ludendorff, on the telephone, demanded that the *Fourth Army* in Flanders should be combed for reinforcements, but this measure had already been taken.

Some ground had been lost and a serious situation had developed east of Bourlon Wood, where, with the capture of Fontaine, a considerable gap was made in the German line. Group Caudry had feared a "break-in", even a "break-through", if tank attacks continued before the defence received strong artillery reinforcements; but these forebodings, which were shared by General von der Marwitz, commanding the *Second Army*, were not justified by the events of the day. Moreover, strong reinforcements began to make their appearance.

During the morning a large portion of the *214th Division* arrived from Douai, and at noon an infantry regiment and an artillery regiment of the *30th Division*, from the Aisne, reached Esnes (5 miles S.E. of Cambrai). By evening practically the whole of the *214th* and *30th* had arrived, and the *119th* and the *3rd Guard Division* from Flanders were beginning to assemble north and south-east of Cambrai. The *5th Guard Division* from the Aisne and several field artillery regiments were reported to be on the move, and six more divisions had been warned.

The two battalions of the *52nd Reserve Regiment* (*107th Division*) in Cantaing and in the uncompleted trenches of the Cantaing

[1] G.O.A. xiii., Rupprecht, Tankschlacht, Bernhardi, and German regimental histories.

Digitized by Google

line, south-east of Bourlon Wood, are stated to have had a very trying day. They had to face the morning attack with very little artillery support and, having no armour-piercing ammunition, did not know how to deal with the tanks. Some field guns were pushed up into the firing line later, to engage the tanks over open sights. Ammunition of all kinds ran short, and after a retirement to the Fontaine—la Folie line reports were received that Bourlon Wood and la Folie Wood had been lost. The withdrawal was therefore continued to the trenches running south from Sailly (the "Wotan III" line), being the last of the defensive positions covering Cambrai on the west. Reinforcements were now at hand, however, and the British allowed the troops a quiet night. The *232nd Reserve Regiment* (also *107th Division*) held the trenches from Cantaing to the canal north of Noyelles where fighting went on all day. The loss of Cantaing exposed the right flank of the regiment which, having expended all its ammunition, is said to have withdrawn eastward across the canal, blowing up the canal bridges at Noyelles and la Folie.

On the front from Bourlon Wood to Moeuvres, the *386th Landwehr Regiment* and remnants of other units of the *20th Landwehr Division* still in the line were further stiffened by the arrival of part of the *50th Regiment* (*214th Division*). Two battalions of the *363rd Regiment* (also *214th Division*) are said to have delivered a counter-attack at Moeuvres. Many batteries of the *214th Division* were in action on the Bourlon—Moeuvres front.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*)
22ND–27TH NOVEMBER

THE CAPTURE OF BOURLON WOOD[1]
(Sketches 8, 9, 10)
22nd November[2]

On the front of the IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. L. Woollcombe) the night of the 21st/22nd November passed without important incident. The day, which broke cold and misty and brought drizzling rain in the afternoon, proved an unsatisfactory one; for the Germans delivered counter-attacks with some success and the corps made little progress. Hostile artillery fire from all calibres of guns was heavy at times upon the Graincourt—Anneux—Cantaing area and about Moeuvres; many more German batteries had come into action between Raillencourt and Pronville.

The 51st Division (Major-General G. M. Harper), on the right, had made some adjustments of its forward positions. By 3 a.m. on the 22nd the 1/9th Royal Scots (154th Brigade), kept in reserve on the previous day, had replaced in Cantaing the 1/4th Gordon Highlanders which was badly in need of relief. At Fontaine the three companies of the 1/4th Seaforth had taken over the defence of the whole village, the 1/7th Argyll companies being moved back on the left to a position facing Bourlon Wood half-way between Fontaine and Anneux.

Soon after dawn enemy aeroplanes appeared over Fontaine and, although rifle-fire kept them at a respectful height, they continued to observe and occasionally opened fire on the defenders. About 10 a.m. groups of Germans were seen advancing, covered by bursts of machine-gun fire, a holding attack from the north being combined with enveloping movements upon Fontaine along the road from Cambrai and from Bourlon Wood. The S.O.S. signals of the Seaforth went unregarded, so an F.O.O. was sent back mounted to

[1] The official name and date for the battle are "Capture of Bourlon Wood," 23rd–28th Nov.; but whilst the operation of the IV. Corps on 22nd Nov. may well be included, the offensive was abandoned on the evening of the 27th.

[2] See Sketch 8.

Digitized by Google

obtain artillery support ;[1] meanwhile the enemy pressed on, regardless of loss. Greatly outnumbered, the Seaforth maintained a stubborn resistance, but when their ammunition ran short they began a fighting retreat in order to escape envelopment. The last party, under the commanding officer, did not withdraw from Fontaine until 2.30 p.m. Farther back on the left the Argyll knew nothing of the attack until noon ; then, facing Fontaine, they took up a line upon which the Seaforth were able to rally. On the other flank parties fell back upon the Royal Scots. From these positions the Germans were prevented by fire from advancing beyond the captured village.[2]

The Seaforth, who numbered only a few hundred men, had been left unsupported in a very vulnerable forward position and had had to pay the penalty. With the loss of Fontaine all prospect of an advance by the 51st Division disappeared, and at night the Seaforth and Argyll were relieved by the 153rd Brigade.

The 62nd Division (Major-General W. P. Braithwaite) was only expected to consolidate its positions and advance them if opportunity offered; but the 185th Brigade, which had taken over the front under very unfavourable conditions, was unable to preserve the gains of the previous day. About dawn the right battalion, 2/7th W. Yorkshire, engaged in some patrol encounters in front of Anneux and on the Cambrai road. At 7 a.m. a hostile barrage of high explosive with some gas shell, came down upon the 2/8th W. Yorkshire at the apex of the line, due south of the Crucifix, and upon the 2/6th on the left. Low-flying aeroplanes attacked, and here also the S.O.S. signal brought no response. The advance of the enemy's infantry forced back the left of the 2/8th where a gap had developed, but the ground lost was recovered by 12.30 p.m., assistance being given by the 2/4th York & Lancaster (187th Brigade). It was, however, the 2/6th W. Yorkshire which received the main force of the German thrust : although a retirement was followed by a partial recovery, a fresh enemy effort at 10.15 a.m. crumpled up the line, which was outflanked on the left, and the battalion,

[1] The artillery of the 51st Div. had all moved up to positions behind the Premy Chapel—Graincourt road by 3 a.m., with the exception of two howitzer batteries which remained behind the Flesquières ridge.

[2] German formations were much mixed ; the assault upon Fontaine was made by parts of the *I* and *II/46th Regt.* (*119th Div.*). See Note at end of Chapter.

Digitized by Google

which had lost nearly all its officers, could only be rallied on the Cambrai road. A little of the ground lost was then recovered by a fresh advance, in which a company of the 2/5th York & Lancaster (187th Brigade) played a part. The reorganization of the line occupied the rest of the day.

Some relief was afforded to the harassed Yorkshiremen by the attack of the 36th Division (Major-General O. S. W. Nugent) made on both sides of the Canal du Nord at 11 a.m., supported by the divisional artillery (less one 18-pdr. battery) and three batteries of 6-inch howitzers, all under the command of the C.R.A., Br.-General F. Potts. Next to the 62nd Division the 107th Brigade (Br.-General W. M. Withycombe) was to clear the Hindenburg support system as far as the canal opposite Moeuvres, and then push forward up the German trenches (the " Wotan II " line) to a point opposite Inchy. Earlier in the morning the leading battalion of the brigade, the 15/R.I. Rifles had moved up to a position of readiness, and at 10.40 a.m. the barrage came down; it was to lift along the trenches 100 yards every ten minutes and eventually become a protective barrage round Moeuvres. The Rifles, however, could make little progress against the many strongpoints in the German trenches, and although the 10th Battalion was also engaged the extent of the advance was negligible. West of the Canal du Nord, where the 108th Brigade (Br.-General C. R. J. Griffith) had relieved the 109th, the 12/R.I. Rifles drove the Germans along the Hindenburg front system, entered Moeuvres, and penetrated to the northern edge of the village. But there was not enough weight in the attack and reinforcements were slow in arriving: exposed to intense machine-gun fire from higher positions west of the village and shelled by the German artillery the Rifles were obliged to give ground before a determined counter-attack delivered from Hobart Trench. They withdrew slowly in good order to the line from which they had started.[1]

The 56th Division (Major-General F. A. Dudgeon) was to enter the Hindenburg front system in rear of the 36th, bomb along the trenches westward, and capture Tadpole Copse. It was supported by two R.F.A. brigades, the C.R.A. (Br.-General R. J. G. Elkington) having also at his

[1] The German units engaged astride the Canal du Nord consisted of the *386th Landwehr* (*20th Landwehr Div.*), the *363rd Regt.* (*214th Div.*) *III/77th Regt.* and *175th Regt.*

Digitized by Google

disposal an extra 18-pdr. battery to provide a slow barrage, lifting 50 yards every few minutes, and five batteries of 6-inch howitzers. Tadpole Copse, the Hindenburg front system west of the copse, and Inchy were all bombarded. The 1/16th London (Queen's Westminster Rifles) of Br.-General E. S. D'E. Coke's 169th Brigade entered the German trenches about 500 yards west of the canal at 11 a.m. followed by the 1/5th London (L.R.B.). The attack on Moeuvres of the 108th Brigade undoubtedly helped this advance which made steady progress; reports were slow in coming back and the first intimation of success was a message, timed 2.40 p.m., which stated that Tadpole Copse was being shelled by the German artillery. Before dusk the London Scottish (168th Brigade) had established a defensive flank, facing north-west, from the copse to the British front line.

During the day the artillery of the 62nd Division, supplemented by three batteries of 6-inch howitzers and two of 60-pdrs. fired a series of "combing" barrages back and forth through Bourlon Wood whilst two batteries of 6-inch howitzers carried out a bombardment of Bourlon village.

In the morning the Commander-in-Chief, accompanied by Major-General R. H. K. Butler, Deputy C.G.S., and Major-General R. L. Mullens, commanding the 1st Cavalry Division, had ridden up to the ridge near Flesquières to view the battle-front. About 5 p.m. he called upon General Byng at Albert and expressed his satisfaction at finding that all was in train for a major effort on the morrow. He pointed out to the Third Army commander that every day's delay would make it harder to get Bourlon, and that in view of the demands of Italy he "could not continue a wasting "fight." He had received a communication from Sir William Robertson who said that "although exploitation "of your splendid success is sound and desirable and is "entirely approved by the War Cabinet, it is equally "necessary when you are deciding the extent to which the "endeavour to exploit should be continued that due regard "be had to probable Italian demands and to a very un-"satisfactory man-power position." The delay in sending reinforcements to repair the battle-wastage of his divisions was one of the Commander-in-Chief's greatest anxieties at this time.

Digitized by Google

In the meantine the IV Corps plans for the morrow were completed; the attack was to be launched along the whole front with carefully organized artillery support, and as many tanks as could be provided. The tasks of the divisions were:

51st Division to recapture Fontaine and, "only if the "artillery fire is not heavy," push tanks and infantry round the north of Bourlon Wood for the capture of the village;

1st Cavalry Division to pass through Fontaine, cover the right of the corps towards Raillencourt, threaten Bourlon village from the north-east, and cut off any troops or guns "between themselves and the village";

40th Division (replacing 62nd Division)[1] to clear Bourlon Wood with tanks and infantry from the south and attack the village from the south-west;

36th Division to continue its attack along the Hindenburg support system on both sides of the Canal du Nord, also, "if the success is complete and the enemy is on the move" to capture Sains and establish an outpost line beyond;

56th Division to continue its advance westward up the Hindenburg front system from Tadpole Copse.

In addition to four brigades of field artillery, the 51st Division was given one battery of 6-inch howitzers and one of 60-pdrs. Special attention was to be paid to the eastern edge of Bourlon Wood and to the reverse slope of the eastern shoulder of the ridge, both being localities where German anti-tank batteries were likely to come into action.

The artillery of the 40th Division joined that of the 62nd near Graincourt during the afternoon of the 22nd so that, with the two Army brigades still in action, the C.R.A. of the 40th Division, Br.-General G. H. W. Nicholson, would have six field artillery brigades under his command. He was also allotted several siege and heavy batteries (twelve 6-inch howitzers and eighteen 60-pdrs.). Under corps control, eighteen 60-pdrs. (twelve to be used for counter-battery work if necessary), ten 6-inch howitzers, four 6-inch guns, four 8-inch howitzers and one 12-inch howitzer were available to fire on the divisional front. The division was to neutralize any anti-tank batteries which might come into action on the southern and western slopes of Bourlon Wood and on the reverse slope of the western shoulder of the

[1] Major-General J. Ponsonby had been informed in the morning that his 40th Div. would relieve the 62nd Div. at night and attack next day.

Digitized by Google

ridge, a smoke barrage being laid to screen the western flank of the attack. The final barrage in front of the farthest objective was to be maintained as long as possible, " having " regard to the ammunition situation ", in order to cover the mopping up of Bourlon village.

The 36th Division had three brigades of field artillery, supplemented by four 6-inch howitzers; and the corps allotted fourteen 6-inch howitzers, four 9.2-inch howitzers and one 12-inch for a destructive bombardment of Moeuvres.

The 56th Division had only its two brigades of field artillery but these would be supplemented by ten 6-inch howitzers, six 8-inch and two 12-inch. A smoke screen was to be laid along the ridge east of Inchy in order to blind the German observation posts.

A considerable force of tanks was to be collected for the attack on the 23rd, although supplies were difficult to get forward, resting crews had to be hurriedly assembled and sections and companies organized from the machines which could be made fit for action. Adequate reconnaissance by tank officers and the establishment of proper liaison with infantry units were out of the question. B and H Battalions (II. Tank Brigade) were each to supply twelve tanks to work with the 51st Division and to these, 24 tanks of C and I Battalions (III. Tank Brigade) were added; 32 tanks from D and G Battalions (I. Tank Brigade) were allotted to the 40th Division; and the 36th Division would have twelve tanks of E Battalion (I. Tank Brigade).

During the day all units of the 1st Cavalry Division concentrated near Metz (nearly 7 miles behind the battle front), the 9th Cavalry Brigade, whose dismounted detachments were with the 6th Division holding the front between Nine Wood and the St. Quentin canal, withdrawing them by arrangement with the infantry. The last regiment to retire was the Queen's Bays (1st Cavalry Brigade) which did not leave its defensive positions in and near Cantaing until late in the afternoon.

The relief of the 62nd Division by the 40th was carried out at night in the face of many difficulties.[1] Owing to the muddy state of the by-roads and tracks too much traffic

[1] After the relief one infantry brigade, one field company R.E., and all the transport which could be spared were taken for work on the forward roads. The casualties of the 62nd Division since the opening of the offensive were returned as 75 officers and 1,613 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

had resort to the only good road, the Bapaume—Cambrai pavé, which became badly congested: part of 40th Division headquarters took 15 hours to cover nine miles; petrol requirements for the tanks could not be completed; and the smoke shell needed by the artillery was not delivered at all.

23RD NOVEMBER[1]

The 23rd November was a day of cold winds with fitful showers of rain. Before daylight, at 6.30 a.m., the 1/6th Gordons and 1/6th Seaforth of the 152nd Brigade (Br.-General H. P. Burn) which were to launch the attack of the 51st Division, formed up, with the tanks of B, H and C Battalions, in the sunken Premy Chapel—Graincourt road. Zero hour was not until 10.30 a.m. but this early deployment was necessary in order to escape the observation, when day broke, of the enemy on the Bourlon ridge. The support battalion, 1/8th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, was sheltered by Orival Wood; in reserve was the 1/5th Seaforth. The tanks of I Battalion came later.

In case more infantry should be needed, Br.-General Burn had at his disposal the 1/9th R. Scots in the front line about Cantaing with the 1/4th Gordons in rear (both 154th Brigade) and the 1/7th Black Watch of the 153rd Brigade which had taken over the left portion of the front after the loss of Fontaine. Divisional headquarters established a report centre at Flesquières château.[2]

On the right the 1/6th Gordons was to recapture Fontaine and establish a position facing north-east on the high ground beyond, the Argyll coming up on the right to form a defensive flank extending back to the right boundary of the division. The 1/6th Seaforth on the left was to clear the slope between Fontaine and Bourlon Wood, then, pushing on, to link up the left of the Gordons with the north-eastern corner of the wood. As usual, the tanks were to lead the way, but the divisional practice of keeping the infantry well behind the tank advance was unfortunately again in evidence.

---

[1] See Sketch 9.

[2] During his visit to the IV. Corps area on the previous day the Commander-in-Chief had commented unfavourably upon the distance separating divisional commanders from their forward troops. "Divisional commanders should be closer up to take a grip of the battle." 51st Div. H.Q. had been at Ytres, over 4½ miles behind the British starting line, on 20th Nov. and had moved next day to Trescault, just behind the old British front.

Digitized by Google

The barrage came down at 10.10 a.m. on a line in front of the village. Twenty minutes later it lifted 200 yards and continued to do so every 20 minutes. At the first lift the tanks moved forward, two females of C Battalion[1] going wide on the right towards la Folie Wood the western edge of which was held by machine-guns and infantry.[2] The machines dispersed many groups of the enemy and caused great confusion, but, having no 6-pdrs., were unable to deal with the accurate machine-gun fire directed from the château in the wood upon the advancing Gordons. One tank was set on fire and transferred its crew to the other which did not withdraw until the afternoon. In the meantime 13 tanks of B Battalion supported closely by six of C Battalion had already entered Fontaine to carry on the fight, in barricaded streets, against the armour-piercing bullets of machine-guns firing from upper stories of houses, anti-tank guns which opened suddenly and unexpectedly at point-blank range, trench mortars, and rushes of German bombers.[3] The advance of the Gordons had started well; but when the battalion, after crossing the Cantaing line, had begun to descend the slope in front of Fontaine heavy blasts of machine-gun fire from the nearest houses and enfilade fire from la Folie château stopped all movement. The companies were rallied in the British front line.[4]

The twelve tanks of H Battalion with three of C Battalion led the 1/6th Seaforth on the left and the whole advance swept forward, without a check between Fontaine and Bourlon Wood. Some of the tanks entered the village at its western end, whilst on the outskirts the Highlanders were engaged in hand-to-hand encounters with German

[1] The male tank which should have accompanied them received a direct hit at the start.

[2] The wood was held by the *46th Res. Regt.* with the *I Bn.* in front; but parts of the *LI Bn.* and of the *II/58th Regt.* are said to have retreated eastward into the wood after the British attack started.

[3] One tank commander reported that when his tank entered the village everything appeared very peaceful and it was difficult to find anything at which to shoot. Suddenly, as if at a given signal, a terrific fire was opened from all sides, upon his tank, chiefly with armour-piercing bullets. In a moment the tank was full of smoke and flame, and most of its guns were put out of action in a few minutes.

[4] Fontaine was defended by the *II/46th Regt.* and one company and one machine-gun company of the *III/46th Regt.* supported and reinforced by the remainder of the regiment and the *II/50th Regt.* (the latter of the *214th Div.*). Parts of other battalions are said to have taken part in the fighting on this day. See Note at end of Chapter.

Digitized by Google

machine-gunners; but tanks and infantry won their way forward along the slope and reached the north-eastern extremity of the wood. A line of posts was established stretching back towards the northern face of Fontaine, but fighting continued as the enemy made several attempts to turn the right flank of this forward position. Here some of the tanks did great execution among the Germans as they came into sight moving southward over the shoulder of the ridge. Other tanks patrolled the edge of Bourlon Wood; two entered the wood and fought there all day with the 40th Division, one of them becoming stranded.

At great self-sacrifice the tanks in Fontaine maintained the fight. Of the 13 tanks of B. Battalion only three, with the crews of four others, regained the British lines. One of C Battalion was hit and set on fire in the village, this unit losing six out of 11 machines in action along the whole front.[1]

In the afternoon Br.-General Burn began preparations to renew the attack upon Fontaine. He proposed to use his reserve battalion, the 1/5th Seaforth, to bomb in from the west; but the German counter-attacks upon the troops of the 40th Division which were in Bourlon Wood[2] compelled the 1/6th Seaforth to fall back from their forward line and no further infantry action was attempted. At 2 p.m., however, 12 tanks of I Battalion arrived at la Justice farm from Ribécourt and at 2.35 p.m. they moved into the fight. Three were sent to the south side of Fontaine, their commanders hoping to be able to carry the infantry forward; this they could not do but they remained in action until nightfall. The other nine entered the village and were hotly engaged until darkness fell, when seven of them managed to return. One had been hit by a trench-mortar shell and abandoned, the fate of the other was never known.[3]

It is significant that the attack of the 152nd Brigade was delivered by two battalions with one in support, the brigade commander having four more battalions at his disposal in case of need: a total of seven, out of which only two were seriously engaged. On the other hand the Germans in

[1] The tank losses of H Battalion, with the Seaforth, are not recorded; but casualties amounted to 9 officers and 20 other ranks.

[2] See below.

[3] One tank commander reported that parties of Germans tried to prevent him firing his guns by hanging on to them.

Digitized by Google

Fontaine and its vicinity amounted to at least ten battalions, probably more.[1] In any case the 48 tanks employed hardly supplied the preponderance of strength generally considered essential to the success of an offensive ; but the strength of the opposition was not known to British Intelligence.

At the end of the day the line of the 152nd Brigade was established in a general south-eastward direction from a point on the Bourlon—Fontaine road at the entrance to the wood to the Cantaing—Fontaine road and thence round Cantaing. On the left the Seaforth were in touch with the right of the 40th Division.

In the 40th Division the 119th Brigade (Br.-General F. P. Crozier) with 16 tanks of G Battalion had the task of clearing Bourlon Wood, whilst the 121st Brigade (Br.-General J. Campbell), assisted by 13 tanks of D Battalion secured the village and the western shoulder of the ridge. The infantry had never seen tanks before, and there was no time for much explanation concerning combined tactics but, in the words of the tank brigade commander, the assaulting battalions "followed the tanks magnificently." Twenty minutes before zero hour the barrage came down along the edge of the wood and at 10.30 a.m. as tanks and infantry closed up, it lifted 200 yards and continued to do so every 10 minutes. The heavy batteries opened for three minutes on certain track junctions within the wood, and then lifted 100 yards every three minutes.

The 119th Brigade attacked with two battalions, the 19/R. Welch Fusiliers and 12/S. Wales Borderers ; three machine guns covered the right flank and, as the advance progressed, the 17/Welch Regiment, following in support, was to cover both flanks of the brigade. Four tanks of D Battalion led the way, as those of G Battalion had been delayed by the late arrival of supplies and could not enter the battle until noon. Pressing forward through the trees the Fusiliers, with some tank assistance, tackled the German machine-gun posts with fire and bayonet and by 11.40 a.m. had reached the Fontaine—Bourlon road running through the centre of the wood. After a necessary pause to re-organize, the battalion pressed on to the northern edge which was reached less than an hour later. The tanks of

[1] See Note at end of Chapter.

Digitized by Google

G Battalion were now in evidence and did good work during this stage of the advance.[1]

A line of posts was now established round the north-eastern edge of the wood, extending on the right to the Fontaine—Bourlon road where two companies of the 17/Welch came into position to cover the flank. Soon, as might have been expected, the edge of the wood was heavily shelled and swept by machine-gun fire, so that the posts had to be withdrawn a hundred yards or so. On the left the 12/S. Wales Borderers had met with fiercer opposition. The two tanks which worked along the western edge of the wood proved invaluable; but progress up the wooded slopes was slow and the losses of the battalion in officers and N.C.O's. were heavy. Nevertheless, the right company reached and entered the houses at the eastern end of Bourlon village, whilst the left company, soon reinforced by part of the 17/Welch, was struggling forward in rear. Then a German counter-attack from the village pushed the left company back to the Fontaine—Bourlon road and the right company, finding itself isolated, fought its way out with the help of a tank and extended the line along the road. There was no sign of the Fusiliers on the right where a gap had developed.

About 3 p.m. a heavy German bombardment was followed by a powerful counter-attack which threatened to envelope and overwhelm the Borderers and the two companies of the 17/Welch[2]. They held on desperately and in the nick of time the 18/Welch, from brigade reserve, entered the fight which for a time swayed to and fro. At last, however, the Germans began to waver and fall back and the Welshmen pressed on until, as the light faded, the crest of the ridge was won.[3] Only the northern slope of the wood now remained in German possession, but to reorganize, reinforce and consolidate the British line was no easy matter in the dark. Two companies of the 14/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (from the 120th Brigade in reserve) arrived about 8 p.m.[4]

[1] Of 16 tanks, 13 reached the northern edge of the wood; two of the others suffered direct hits and one had mechanical trouble.

[2] This counter-attack was delivered by the *9th Grenadier Regt.* (*3rd Guard Div.*) and half of the *I/175th Regt.*

[3] Lieut.-Col. W. Kennedy, 18/Welch, was killed whilst leading his battalion.

[4] The Works company and the Salvage company of the 119th Brigade were also sent up.

Digitized by Google

to reinforce the mingled units of the 119th Brigade. Lieut.-Colonel R. Benzie, 12/S. Wales Borderers, was placed in command of the whole forward area, whilst a composite battalion formed of the troops of the 119th Brigade now came under Lieut.-Colonel J. Plunkett, 19/R. Welch Fusiliers. Covered by patrols a continuous line was formed and the position so much improved that when the enemy delivered a violent counter-attack at 11.45 p.m. it was firmly repulsed.

In the 121st Brigade the 20/Middlesex on the right was directed against the southern edge of Bourlon village and ordered to keep in close touch with the 119th Brigade. The advance of the left battalion, 13/Green Howards, was to be made in conjunction with the 107th Brigade (36th Division) until the Yorkshiremen reached a position where, pivoting on the 20/Middlesex, they could swing right-handed and assault the village from the west. As the final objective, 500 yards beyond the village, extended westward to Deligny Mill (half-way between Bourlon and the Canal du Nord) the 21/Middlesex, moving in support, with three sections of machine guns, was directed to cover the left flank of the brigade. From the outset the whole advance was exposed to shell fire; also to machine-gun fire from posts in the Marquion Line and from farther west where the 107th Brigade (36th Division) in the Hindenburg support system was held up. The Green Howards were soon checked and the 21/Middlesex, which pushed parties into the area of the 107th Brigade, were in no better case. On the right three of the six tanks of D Battalion which led the 20/Middlesex received direct hits, but in all seven tanks made their way into Bourlon where they underwent a similar experience to those which had entered Fontaine.[1] Some of the 20/Middlesex got in on the southern side, parties of the Green Howards appeared in the western end and confused fighting continued; but there was never any prospect of driving the Germans out of Bourlon. About 3.30 p.m., the forward troops of the brigade, who had been reinforced by part of the reserve battalion, the 12/Suffolk, were digging in on a line which ran approximately south-westward from a point a little short of Bourlon village to the left boundary of the line from which the attack had started. The 40th Division

[1] Three tanks expended all their ammunition before they approached Bourlon and then withdrew.

Digitized by Google

had put in eight battalions, plus the tanks, against six or seven German battalions.[1]

As already mentioned, the check to the 107th Brigade (36th Division), attacking east of the Canal du Nord had handicapped the advance of the 121st Brigade. Br.-General Withycombe's 107th Brigade was expected to clear the Hindenburg support system as far as the canal, and then capture Quarry Wood, a mile ahead, with Hobart Trench which, on the right, lay just beyond the wood. Only one field artillery brigade, supplemented by four 6-inch howitzers supported the attack. E Battalion (I Brigade) mustered 11 tanks, but there was no time to arrange a concerted plan of attack by tanks and infantry. However, two tanks were to proceed up the Hindenburg support system; two were to make for Round Trench, the chief centre of resistance in the "horseshoe"; and two were to advance along the canal bank against Lock 5. The others, together with all survivors of the first attack, were intended to deal with the more distant objectives.

Unfortunately one of the tanks which were to work along the Hindenburg trenches became ditched at the start and the other lost direction and was never seen again. Assisted by a thin barrage the 15/R.I. Rifles did its best, suffering and inflicting many casualties; but the progress of the battalion along the Hindenburg trenches was negligible. The 8/R.I. Rifles took Round Trench, on which one tank expended all its ammunition, the other could not help, having received a direct hit. The 8th, with tank assistance, also captured Lock 5; but this was the extent of the day's success. Although the other five tanks came into action with some effect they suffered heavy loss.[2]

West of the Canal du Nord three brigades of field artillery covered the attack of the 108th Brigade on Moeuvres which was bombarded by fourteen 6-inch and four 9.2-inch howitzers and one 12-inch howitzer. No tanks were provided. A stubborn resistance was encountered by the 9/R. Irish Fusiliers and 12/R.I. Rifles, but the Germans were

[1] Prisoners taken by the 40th Div. were from the *50th Regt.* (*214th Div.*); the *Lehr Regt.* and *9th Grenadiers* (*3rd Guard Div.*); *I/175th Regt.* (*36th Div.*); and, west of Bourlon Wood, the *77th Regt.* (*20th Div.*). See Note at end of Chapter.

[2] Only four tanks rallied after the action. Five were knocked out by direct hits and one was badly ditched behind the German lines. Casualties to personnel amounted to 6 officers and 46 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

pressed back slowly towards the village, better progress being made when the 2/R. I. Rifles reinforced the leading battalions. By dusk about three-quarters of Moeuvres was in the hands of the Ulstermen, but the position could not be maintained owing to the intense machine-gun fire poured in from both flanks. A retirement had to be made to the shattered houses on the southern edge.[1]

On the left of the 36th Division the 56th extended its hold upon the Hindenburg front system beyond Tadpole Copse, the London Scottish (168th Brigade) with the assistance of two companies of the 1/4th London (Royal Fusiliers) bombing their way beyond the Inchy—Louveral road, and taking 70 prisoners of the *20th Division*. The communication trenches leading to the Hindenburg support system had been filled with wire which barred all progress in that direction.[2]

As the result of the complaints of German air-attacks, made by the troops during the two previous days, the R.F.C. allotted 50 machines from four fighter squadrons to provide close support for the infantry. Losses were heavy, 30 per cent. of the aeroplanes engaged being wrecked, but the results were adjudged to be well worth while.[3] The bombing of railway stations and junctions behind the German front had continued daily since the opening of the offensive, although these operations were hampered by unfavourable weather.

Third Army headquarters knew little of the actual situation about Bourlon apart from the fact that our troops were heavily engaged in the wood ; such reports as were received during the day were misleading, for they claimed much

[1] According to Tankschlacht the *II/88th Res. Regt.* (*21st Res. Div.*) delivered a successful counter-attack from the direction of Inchy in the afternoon.

[2] The 416th (Edinburgh) Field Coy. R.E. which had built a light bridge across the canal on the main Cambrai road during the previous night, repaired it under fire after it had been hit. By midnight, 23rd/24th Nov., a second bridge was completed, near the first.

[3] A two-gun battery holding up three tanks on the Bourlon front was silenced by bombing long enough to enable the tanks to advance ; and a strongpoint which checked troops of the 36th Div. was neutralized by diving attacks. (See " The War in the Air " Vol. IV. pp. 245–7.)
Moser states, however, that German pilots, and German guns, held the upper hand.

Digitized by Google

greater success than had been achieved.[1] At 2.5 p.m. the Army informed the IV. Corps by telephone that if an "extra "push with fresh troops" were needed to turn the scale the 1st Cavalry Division could be used dismounted and another cavalry division would be placed at the disposal of the corps. General Byng was plainly divided between his anxiety to make sure of the possession of the Bourlon ridge and his fear that if so much were accomplished an opportunity for cavalry action might be missed. At 2.30 p.m. he told the Cavalry Corps that the latest air reports indicated that Bourlon Wood was won: Lieut.-General Kavanagh should get into personal touch with Lieut.-General Woollcombe and concert measures ("if we do hold Bourlon and "the opportunity for cavalry action presents itself") for passing cavalry through to mop up northward and "operate "against Cambrai from the west". Immediately afterwards the Guards Division was placed under the IV. Corps: it was to relieve the 51st Division as soon as possible and also provide a reserve for the Bourlon front. Half an hour later the Cavalry Corps was ordered to bring the 2nd Cavalry Division forward to the Fins—Gouzeaucourt area, five miles south of Flesquières.

At this time the Commander-in-Chief was chiefly concerned that the chance of securing and holding the ridge should not be missed through lack of troops; at 8 p.m. he sent a special message to General Byng to emphasise that, if necessary, dismounted cavalry should be used "in any "numbers" for this purpose.

The 1st Cavalry Division had started the day under the orders of the 51st Division, the 9th Cavalry Brigade moving forward from Metz to Flesquières. As no opportunity arose for mounted action the brigade was placed at the disposal of the 40th Division at 5 p.m. and later, moved up to Graincourt. Here a dismounted battalion was formed[2], and before midnight the 19th Hussars and Bedfordshire Yeomanry companies took over the left portion of the line held by the 121st Brigade. The 15th Hussars company was held in reserve at Anneux.

[1] Even at 7 p.m. a IV. Corps situation report said, "R.F.C. certain we "hold Fontaine and Bourlon village."

[2] It consisted of some 650 of all ranks, with 12 machine guns, each regiment contributing one company.

Digitized by Google

The Guards Division (Major-General G. P. T. Feilding) had marched at 5.30 a.m. from the Barastre area (5 miles S.E. of Bapaume) and arrived south-west of Boursies at 10 a.m. At this time the Guards were still under the V. Corps. At IV. Corps headquarters it was hoped that the 51st and 40th Divisions would capture Fontaine and Bourlon during the day, and in that case the Guards would probably be used on the left to exploit the success northward : such had been the forecast given over the telephone by the Chief General Staff Officer of the IV. Corps at 8.30 a.m. Major-General Feilding therefore proceeded to make a personal reconnaissance of the country, and in his absence orders were received from the IV. Corps for the Guards Division to relieve the Highlanders that night. The relief was carried out with remarkable smoothness considering that the various headquarters of the formations of the 51st Division, which were not aware that relief was imminent, proved hard to find and that communications were bad. Snow fell during the night and was followed by rain. However, by 1 a.m. on the 24th the 1st Guards Brigade had taken over the forward positions and before dawn the 3rd Guards Brigade had moved into support at Flesquières. The two brigades had covered more than 15 miles, half of the distance being over difficult unknown ground in the dark.[1]

Still concerned for the security of what had been so hardly won, at 11.5 p.m. the Army directed the IV. Corps to relieve the leading brigades of the 40th Division, if they had suffered heavy casualties, putting in the reserve brigade and reinforcing with part of the Guards Division ; the message added that the corps commander should have no compunction in asking for more troops if he felt they were needed.[2] An hour later the Army informed the corps that not only could the 1st Cavalry Division be used dismounted if required, but that the 2nd Cavalry Division was now at the disposal of the corps.

Other reinforcements were in sight, for G.H.Q. had moved towards the battlefront the two divisions whose transfer to Italy had been cancelled at the request of the Commander-in-Chief. The 2nd Division came from Flanders by rail to

[1] The 51st Division, for the period 20th–23rd Nov. (inclusive) returned a total of 68 officers and 1,502 other ranks, battle casualties.

[2] The IV. Corps at once issued orders for the relief of the 40th Div. by the 62nd Div. on the night 25th/26th Nov.

Digitized by Google

Bapaume and the 47th Division, which had left the First Army on the 22nd, was arriving by march route in the Achiet area.

24TH NOVEMBER[1]

The IV. Corps, in orders issued at 12.50 a.m., aimed at securing Bourlon village. For this purpose it allotted 12 tanks of I Battalion to the 40th Division, together with two dismounted battalions (1st and 2nd) from the 1st Cavalry Division. The Guards, who were to make no attack, held one brigade in reserve, close to Bourlon Wood, to reinforce if necessary. It was intended that the left flank of the attack should be covered by a fresh attempt of the 36th Division to clear the Hindenburg support system as far as the Canal du Nord and push on towards Quarry Wood and Inchy. The 56th Division was to secure a footing in the Hindenburg support system north-east of Tadpole Copse.

Actually the day's fighting centred on Bourlon Wood and village. The 36th Division, which repulsed a counter-attack upon Lock 5, did not advance in the afternoon as had been intended, owing to the fact that the British heavy artillery was fully engaged in supporting the 40th Division, so that guns could not be spared to bombard the Hindenburg support system. Beyond the Canal du Nord the 56th Division had been driven back along the support line of the Hindenburg front system during the night of the 23rd/24th November and lost more of the trench during the day; consequently it was deemed wiser to reorganize and postpone the attack of the 168th Brigade until the morrow.[2]

There was no change in the weather; high winds continued and heavy rain fell at intervals. In front of Fontaine the day passed quietly as the Guards re-organized and consolidated their line. During the morning the 2nd Guards Brigade moved up into reserve near Ribécourt, a mile south-east of Flesquières; but it was not until after darkness had fallen that the artillery of the Guards Division[3] (LXXIV. and LXXV. Brigades, R.F.A.) joined the four field artillery brigades already covering the front.

---

[1] See Sketch 10.

[2] At midnight the VI. Corps (Lieut-Gen. J. A. L. Haldane) extended its right boundary to include the 56th Div. area.

[3] C.R.A., Br.-General F. A. Wilson.

Digitized by Google

In Bourlon Wood the 119th Brigade of the 40th Division had received some reinforcement during the night of the 23rd/24th November: the remaining two companies of the 14/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (120th Brigade) eight guns of the 204th Machine-Gun Company, and the 15th Hussars company of the 9th Cavalry Battalion. The Germans had shown signs of activity in the early hours, and at 8.30 a.m. they concentrated near Fontaine and near Bourlon village. Fifteen minutes later they attacked against both flanks of the brigade, but were beaten off with heavy loss by artillery, machine-gun, Lewis gun and rifle fire. The wood was shelled without intermission and at 11 a.m. a fresh German advance against the right was smashed by artillery and rifle fire except upon the extreme flank where the enemy established a forward position.[1] British casualties were mounting and when, at 3 p.m. the enemy came on in force from east and north-east the right portion of the line was not strong enough to hold: it was pushed back until it faced eastward across the centre of the wood.

The fighting grew heavier and more confused as the Germans flung in fresh troops; they gained more ground in some places and in others were beaten back by fierce counter-attacks. Outnumbered and very weary, in dire need of reinforcement and relief, the British maintained the struggle and prepared for a fresh effort.[2] About 4 p.m. a confused but well-knit line of Welch, Welch Fusiliers, Borderers, Highlanders and Hussars, with the battalion staff of the Fusiliers distributed where needed as section leaders, and with the commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel J. Plunkett in the centre, pressed forward and drove the Germans back down the northern slopes of the wood there to be caught by the British barrage.[3] In the north-eastern corner of the wood remnants of the 17/Welch who had been cut off, fought their way back individually, after efforts to reach them, made by the Argyll and some of the Hussars, had failed.

[1] The morning counter-attacks were delivered by the *I* and half the *II/Lehr Regt.* (*3rd Guard Div.*); one company *23rd Res. Pioneers* (*214th Div.*); and two companies *I/50th Regt.* (*214th Div.*).

[2] The German reinforcements which were put in during the afternoon consisted of part of the *9th Grenadiers* and the *I/Guard Fusiliers* (both *3rd Guard Div.*).

[3] In this counter-attack the high standard of musketry displayed by the 15th Hussars was said to have demoralized the Germans.

Digitized by Google

The defence of Bourlon Wood on this day may well be called a " soldier's battle ", for nothing but the prowess of the regimental officers and men had prevented the Germans, much superior in numbers and backed by a stronger artillery,[1] from sweeping through to the Cambrai road. As darkness fell the work of reorganizing and consolidating the line began. It was not until midnight that more reinforcements appeared. These consisted of the 2/Scots Guards[2] (3rd Guards Brigade) from la Justice, and two companies of the 11/King's Own (120th Brigade). The Guards battalion filled a gap in the line on the right, linking up with the 1st Guards Brigade holding the Fontaine front.

The attack of the 121st Brigade (left brigade of the 40th Division) on Bourlon village had been fixed for noon, but was altered to 3 p.m. Soon after 9 a.m., however, the corps commander visited Major-General Ponsonby[3] at his headquarters at Havrincourt and gave his opinion that the 12 tanks of I Battalion were too few to ensure the success of the operation ; he therefore decided to postpone the attack until next day. The appropriate orders were sent to the headquarters of the brigades and of the supporting artillery, all established in the Graincourt area ; but communications failed owing to heavy hostile shelling, and the 121st Brigade did not know of the cancellation until too late. So at 3 p.m the assault on Bourlon village was delivered.

The 12 tanks of I Battalion led the way followed nearly 200 yards in rear[4], by the leading companies of the 14/Highland L.I. (from the 120th Brigade) and the 12/Suffolk. Many of the tanks reached and entered the village and destroyed some machine-gun posts ; but, as no infantry appeared to be following they withdrew again.[5] The H.L.I. reached the nearest houses a little later and pushed on

[1] The equivalent of six British battalions, most of them tired and thinned by casualties, had met about eight German battalions, mainly fresh troops. Moser, commanding the Arras Group, who states that he ordered the railway behind the Bourlon ridge to be entrenched on this day, claims that 50 batteries were in action behind this line.

[2] Placed at the disposal of the 119th Bde. at 8 p.m.

[3] IV. Corps advanced H.Q. opened at Metz at 10.30 a.m.

[4] A distance of 100–200 yards between tanks and infantry was laid down in the brigade operation order.

[5] Only four rallied ; one had its petrol tank pierced and was abandoned ; five had mechanical break-downs ; one was ditched ; one received a direct hit and was burnt out.

Digitized by Google

through Bourlon to the railway which formed the battalion objective; but there was insufficient weight in the attack and no provision had been made for "mopping up". Consequently the three leading companies, consolidating a position along the railway, were quite cut off from the fourth company and battalion headquarters: in between lay the greater part of Bourlon with many Germans still in possession of the cellars and houses.[1] The Suffolk, on the left of the H.L.I., had been unable to make much progress, owing to enfilade fire from the machine-gun posts in the Marquion line. Although the right company got some men into Bourlon the battalion was back on its starting-line by 5 p.m.

As soon as it was known that the 121st Brigade attack had gone in Major-General Ponsonby placed under Br.-General Campbell's orders all that now remained of the 120th Brigade in reserve: the 13/E. Surrey, the 11/King's Own (less two companies) and the 120th Machine-Gun Company.

The Commander-in-Chief, who visited General Byng at Albert in the morning, again insisted that no effort be spared to secure and maintain the Bourlon position; but he still retained some hope that there might arise an opportunity for cavalry action which, if turned to account, would put an end to the "wasting battle" which he could so ill afford. Consequently when, at 1.50 p.m., the Army issued to the IV. Corps orders for operations against Bourlon and Sains to be continued on the morrow a forecast was added of what the Army's action would be "if the capture of Bourlon "village enables the cavalry to get through". The G.O.C. Cavalry Corps was to take command of the operations north of Bourlon, employing all five cavalry divisions to exploit success; if the cavalry were able to get into open country north of Bourlon the Army would move up more infantry in support, placing such forces under the Cavalry Corps. The gist of this forecast was repeated at 7 p.m. in the IV. Corps order for the 40th Division to attack Bourlon "with "tanks"[2] at 7 a.m. on the morrow and the 36th Division to carry out the attack originally fixed for the 24th. All

[1] Part of the *Lehr Regt* (*3rd Guard Div.*) was in Bourlon village but several other units assisted in its defence. In the early afternoon the *III/Guard Fusiliers* was sent into Bourlon. See Note at end of Chapter.

[2] A serious oversight, for at 11.20 a.m. the Army had ordered all tanks, except those in action, to be withdrawn into reserve for refitment.

Digitized by Google

available heavy artillery was to shell Bourlon village during the night, only ceasing at zero hour.

British Intelligence was now aware of the arrival of the *214th, 119th* and *3rd Guard Divisions* and anticipated that more German reinforcements would soon appear.[1]

At 9.20 p.m. the 40th Division passed to the corps the information that Bourlon village was in British hands: this report reached the Army by telephone at 10.10 p.m. Twenty minutes later a telegram was despatched from the corps impressing upon the 40th Division that the railway, which ran in a cutting beyond Bourlon village, must be held in order to allow the cavalry to pass through at 11 a.m. next morning. This message crossed the first intimation from the division that all was not well in Bourlon "One battalion "and two companies"[2] stated Major-General Ponsonby, "are north of the village. Am sending up one battalion to "support them. Prisoners state counter-attack will take "place to-morrow. Can you send 12 tanks to support "these battalions in Bourlon village before daybreak?" The IV. Corps, although no tanks could be available,[3] promised that they should be there; and so, counting upon tank assistance, the 40th Division issued orders for an attack upon the 25th which, if successful, would accomplish the relief of the isolated companies of the H.L.I.

At this time the only reserve left to the 40th Division consisted of the two remaining dismounted battalions of the 1st Cavalry Division. Of these troops the 2nd Cavalry Battalion had moved up from Metz to the vicinity of Havrincourt at 2 p.m., the 1st Cavalry Battalion following at 11 p.m. During the night the latter took over the front on the right of the 9th Cavalry Battalion whilst the former occupied a position in support near Anneux Chapel. The 2nd Cavalry Division, now in the Fins—Gouzeaucourt area, constituted the IV. Corps reserve. In the afternoon its commander, Major-General Greenly, had ridden forward and made the rounds of the headquarters of the divisions in action and had afterwards called at the headquarters of the Cavalry Corps. Here at 6 p.m. he was made acquainted with the corps order issued two hours later: the 2nd Cavalry

[1] See Note at end of Chapter.

[2] In reality only three companies.

[3] See page 139, f.n. 2.

Digitized by Google

Division to move forward at 6.30 a.m. on the 25th to a position near Flesquières in readiness, when Bourlon was reported taken, to pass through the infantry, reach the Cambrai—Arras road, and make as much ground as possible towards Marquion.[1]

On the 24th November the Commander-in-Chief issued a Special Order of the Day, thanking commanders and all ranks of all arms and services for their exertions and congratulating them on the success so far achieved. The opening paragraph ran: "The capture of the important "Bourlon position yesterday crowns a most successful "operation and opens the way to a further exploitation of "the advantages already gained."

NOTE

THE GERMANS, 22ND—24TH NOVEMBER[2]

General von der Marwitz, commanding the *Second Army*, reported to Rupprecht on the morning of the 22nd November that there were not enough fresh troops in hand to launch a counter-attack before the 27th; artillery reinforcements were only "dribbling in". The *Sixth Army* expected a British attack south of the Scarpe, which would have given effective support to the Cambrai offensive. Rupprecht judged it wiser not to weaken the *Fourth Army* unduly, in spite of the demands of Ludendorff who said, also, that he hoped to be able to bring four or five divisions from Russia by the beginning of December. Reports of increased railway traffic south and south-west of St. Quentin indicated a possible attack by the French, so O.H.L. reinforced this sector with a division from the *Seventh Army* (Laon) and an artillery regiment from the General Reserve.

At 6 a.m. the front of the Arras Group (commanded by Lieut.-General von Moser) was extended eastward to Bourlon Wood (inclusive), the *20th Division* being responsible for Inchy—Moeuvres and the *214th Division* for Moeuvres—Bourlon Wood. Lieut.-General von Moser nominated the *21st Reserve Division*, arriving from Laon, as counter-attack division and asked for the *3rd Guard Division* which had come from Flanders.

[1] The 5th Cav. Div. had moved back from Fins to the Bray area on the 23rd; the 3rd Cav. Div. from Bray to Contay (8 miles W. of Albert); and the 4th Cav. Div. from Fins to Athies (5 miles S. of Péronne). These three divisions were under one hour's notice to move, and at 7.30 p.m. the 4th Cav. Div. was ordered to march to Villers Faucon next morning.

[2] Mainly from Rupprecht, Moser and Tankschlacht.

Digitized by Google

Between Bourlon Wood and la Folie Wood troops of the *119th Division*, as they came into action, passed under the command of Major-General Havenstein (*107th Division*), who, on the morning of the 22nd, was uncertain whether the British were in Fontaine. Detachments of the *II* and *III/58th Regiment* approached the village from Bourlon Wood; but it was the *I* and *II/46th Regiment*—all the companies were not employed—advancing south from Raillencourt who were ordered to attack supported by part of their own divisional artillery, the *II/237th F.A. Regiment*.

By the 23rd November the front between the St. Quentin canal and Bourlon Wood had been taken over by the *119th Division* which engaged all of its three infantry regiments, *46th*, *58th* and *46th Reserve*. The *II* and *III/58th Regiment* (la Folie Wood—Fontaine) were reinforced during the day by part of the *52nd Reserve Regiment* (*107th Division*) from its position along the railway north-east of Fontaine. The *II/50th Regiment* (*214th Division*) was also behind Fontaine.

In Bourlon Wood and village, held mainly by the *50th Regiment* (*214th Division*) since the 21st November, the *Lehr Regiment* (*3rd Guard Division*) had began on the night of the 22nd/23rd November a relief which was interrupted by the British attack next morning. Two companies of the *Lehr Regiment* took part in the fight.

In the Canal du Nord sector the whole of the *21st Reserve Division* had now arrived, and fresh units of the *20th Division* (*II/92nd Regiment*, part of the *79th Regiment*, and the *10th Pioneers*) entered the battle.

On the 24th November the *Second Army* reported to Rupprecht that a counter-attack from the east could be launched on the 27th, sufficient artillery ammunition having arrived. Rupprecht anticipated that the British might be about to attack the *Sixth Army* astride the Scarpe with a simultaneous diversion at or south of St. Quentin. "The enemy will do anything to exploit "his success". He knew that British troops had been brought from Flanders.

In Bourlon Wood and village the *Lehr Regiment* (*3rd Guard Division*) had now relieved most of the *50th Regiment* (*214th Division*) whose colonel, according to the German practice, remained in command. The line was held from west to east by the *Lehr Regiment* and *9th Grenadiers* (both *3rd Guard Division*) with a company of the *I/175th Regiment* in the château on the north-western outskirts of Bourlon village and the *III/88th Reserve*

Digitized by Google

Regiment (detached from the *21st Reserve Division*) filling gaps on the south-eastern side. In reserve was the *Guard Fusilier Regiment* (*3rd Guard Division*). It is described as a " variegated " collection of defenders ". During the afternoon, when the German counter-attack was seen to have made no progress, the *I/Guard Fusiliers* was brought up, and about 8 p.m. further reinforcements arrived in the shape of four companies of the *46th Reserve Regiment* (*119th Division*). The situation was regarded as critical. Much reorganization took place during the night, the general commanding the *3rd Guard Division* now taking over at Bourlon Wood. The *221st Division* had begun to arrive behind the Arras Group from Champagne.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917
(*continued*)

22ND–27TH NOVEMBER

THE CAPTURE OF BOURLON WOOD (*concluded*)

(Sketches 11, 12)

25TH NOVEMBER[1]

After a stormy night a high wind prevailed with showers of rain, but the weather improved later and there were bright intervals, allowing good observation. The day was an unsatisfactory one for the IV. Corps which, apart from an ill-starred effort to clear the Germans from Bourlon village, attempted little and achieved nothing.

During the small hours preparations for the advance into Bourlon village to join up with the isolated companies of the H.L.I. were made on the front of Br.-General Campbell's 121st Brigade (40th Division) on the western side of the wood.

Here the confusion of units was considerable. The forward position, connecting on the left with the 36th Division, consisted of a hastily organized line of posts, some of which could not be approached in daylight. This line was held by the 12/Suffolk and the 1st and 9th Battalions of the 1st Cavalry Division; about the factory on the Cambrai pavé were grouped the remnants of the 13/Green Howards (4 officers and 120 men) and the 20th and 21/Middlesex. The only fresh troops at hand were the 13/East Surrey and the 11/King's Own (less two companies), both of the 120th Brigade. Thus, as the King's Own were to be kept back in support, the advance into Bourlon became the task of one solitary battalion, lacking the assistance of tanks and without artillery support, seeing that fire could not be directed upon Bourlon owing to the uncertainty of the whereabouts of the H.L.I.

The East Surrey, skilfully led forward by their commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel H. L. Warden, who had made a

[1] See Sketch 11.

Digitized by Google

personal reconnaissance in the darkness, were assembled near the south-eastern edge of the village by 6 a.m. The three leading companies were each to send one platoon straight forward to connect with and reinforce the H.L.I., whilst the other platoons " mopped up " the village, each company having been allotted a definite sector. The fourth company was kept in reserve. At 6.15 a.m., just before dawn, the advance began, but almost at once fire opened from the trees in the right rear of the battalion. This was dealt with by the reserve company which faced about and attacked the Germans in the wood. At the same time battalion headquarters of the H.L.I. and the remains of one company were discovered in a building on the Fontaine road at the entrance to Bourlon. Lieut.-Colonel Warden joined the H.L.I. headquarters ; and, as the right company of the East Surrey could make no progress through the houses in the face of powerful German resistance, it was used to strengthen the position. Whilst the other two companies maintained an unequal struggle in the village, the combined headquarters, which had set about converting the building into a strongpoint, repelled attacks from north, east and south. But there seemed little chance of getting help to the forward companies of the H.L.I.[1]

Actually these companies, on and near the railway on the northern side of Bourlon, were surrounded by the enemy who had been reinforced during the night ; and although a stout resistance was maintained until all ammunition was spent, the survivors were compelled to surrender about 9.30 a.m.[2]

Men of the two companies of the East Surrey, fighting in Bourlon village, now began to drift back[3] and were utilized to strengthen Lieut.-Colonel Warden's position, which had become a bastion on the left front of the 119th Brigade in Bourlon Wood. Precarious touch with this brigade was obtained during the afternoon, and the fight continued. The arrival of a section of the 121st Trench Mortar Battery eased the situation somewhat, for the mortars made good practice

[1] Lieut.-Col. C. W. Battye, commanding the H.L.I., was mortally wounded about 7 a.m. and died almost at once.

[2] About 80 were left. The total casualties of the 14/H.L.I were 17 officers and 426 other ranks.

[3] According to Tankschlacht the village was held by the *III* and *I/Guard Fusiliers* ; the British were driven back by machine-gun fire.

Digitized by Google

against houses which contained German riflemen and machine-gunners. The enemy also brought up mortars, fortunately not until the light had become too bad for these weapons to range upon the East Surrey stronghold. There Lieut.-Colonel Warden continued to conduct the struggle, although he was actually in advance of the positions occupied by what remained of his battalion.

In Bourlon Wood, where the line, composed of very tired troops of the 119th Brigade and attached units,[1] was perilously thin, a short advance had been carried out at dawn, principally by the 2/Scots Guards. This effort had gained ground on the right. At 2 p.m. a general advance was ordered with the object of clearing the enemy from the northern and north-eastern fringes of the wood; but the movement clashed with a German attack, and when the fighting died down only a little progress on the flanks had been made. Whilst daylight lasted the British were given very little rest, for the Germans continued to come on and were only repulsed with difficulty.[2]

The 2nd Cavalry Division had marched from the Fins area at dawn and arrived near Ribécourt about 11 am.. In the meantime its commander, Major-General Greenly, had conferred with Major-General Ponsonby and arranged for a cavalry advance in case the way through Bourlon should be opened by the 40th Division. Before noon, however, all such hopes were abandoned, and the 2nd Cavalry Division proceeded to form three dismounted battalions, one from each brigade, which were placed under the orders of the 40th Division. The horses were sent back to Fins.

On the right of the 40th Division the Guards, holding a front of about 4,400 yards from Cantaing to the eastern edge of Bourlon Wood, were left undisturbed by the enemy except for a certain amount of shelling. The 36th Division on the left flank also spent an inactive day which was reported to have "passed quietly". The projected attack was cancelled, as the IV. Corps was contemplating an extension eastward of the divisional front. This, however, was not

[1] 12/S.W.B., 19/R.W. Fus., 17th and 18/Welch (119th Bde.); 14/Argyll, 2 coys 11/King's Own (120th Bde.); 15th Hrs. coy (1st Cav. Div.); 2/Scots Guards (3rd Guards Bde.),

[2] See Note at end of Chapter.

Digitized by Google

carried out, the relief of the Ulstermen being almost due.

Farther still to the left, the VI. Corps had ordered the 56th Division to recapture the support trench of the Hindenburg front system as far forward as the position held in the front trench beyond the Inchy—Louveral road. To do this the 1/12th London (Rangers) relieved the London Scottish (both 168th Brigade) and attacked from the front trench up the communication trenches at 1 p.m., whilst a company of the 1/4th London fought its way along the support trench. Some progress was made, but the Germans made repeated counter-attacks. When darkness fell the front trench was held to a point beyond the Inchy road; in the support trench British and Germans were in contact north of Tadpole Copse where bombing encounters continued.

Soon after darkness had fallen the first troops of the 62nd Division arrived and the relief of the 40th Division began. It was completed without special difficulty before midnight although hostile shelling inflicted some casualties upon the 186th Brigade. This brigade took over the Bourlon Wood position from the 119th Brigade and attached troops who, in spite of every German effort, had retained possession of the highest part of the ridge. Although withdrawn, the 2/Scots Guards were retained in support and the 4/Grenadier Guards (also 3rd Guards Brigade) was brought up to fill a similar rôle. In front of Bourlon village the 187th Brigade relieved the 121st Brigade and attached units, including the 9th Cavalry Battalion, but the 1st Cavalry Battalion remained in the line, and the 2nd Cavalry Battalion in its support positions.

The incoming troops had no knowledge of the 13/E. Surrey. Lieut.-Colonel Warden depended upon runners for communication, and after dark an order, timed 2.40 p.m., reached him from the 121st Brigade: the 40th Division was to be relieved by the 62nd, and the East Surrey would withdraw as soon as the H.L.I. and other parties isolated in Bourlon had been brought back with the help of the tanks which had been ordered up in unknown numbers at an unnamed hour. In the circumstances, Lieut.-Colonel Warden decided to maintain his position.[1]

[1] The casualties of the 40th Div. amounted to 172 officers and 4,017 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

The Commander-in-Chief, who felt that something vital was lacking in the conduct of the operations of the IV. Corps, recommended General Byng to assume personal control. After seeing the report of a Staff officer from G.H.Q., who had made a forward reconnaissance, the Field-Marshal was more than ever convinced of the absolute necessity of securing, without delay, the shoulders of the Bourlon ridge whence the enemy had direct observation over the British battery positions. He considered that the task should not be beyond the powers of the troops available. So far as gun-power was concerned he reckoned that 80 medium and heavy guns and howitzers and 144 field guns and howitzers were in action on this front.[1] His verbal instructions to General Byng on this day were confirmed in writing[2]: immediate steps were to be taken to secure such tactical points on the front and flanks of Bourlon Wood as might be considered necessary for the security of the position; favourable opportunities for local exploitation "especially "by mounted troops" should be seized; plans and preparations should be made for following up in case of any enemy withdrawal; the security of the Bourlon position was, nevertheless, the vital need and the 2nd and 47th Divisions and the Cavalry Corps were temporarily at the Army's disposal until this end should be ensured; once the line was stabilized the Cavalry Corps must be withdrawn to take over the front allotted to it for the winter.

To the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, for the reassurance of the War Cabinet, Sir Douglas Haig sent the following telegram: "My orders to Byng are to complete "capture of Bourlon position and such tactical points on "its flanks as are necessary to secure it. The positions "gained are to be held and troops to be ready to exploit "any local advantage and follow up any retirement of enemy. "Nothing beyond above to be attempted. For purposes "stated second and forty-seventh divisions and cavalry "remain at his disposal for present. Bourlon hill is a feature "of great importance because it overlooks Cambrai and the "approaches to the town as well as the country northwards "to the Sensée marshes".

[1] This was a fair estimate, for on 23rd Nov. when four divisions attacked on a frontage of nearly 12,000 yards (Fontaine—Inchy) the respective figures of the artillery employed were 120 and 312 (see pages 124, 125).

[2] Appendix 14.

Digitized by Google

The evening report of the IV. Corps, received by the Third Army at 6.45 p.m., contained no definite information regarding the situation at Bourlon, but it was obvious that another big effort was required if the Germans were to be driven back clear of the wood and village and of the shoulders of the ridge. At 11.35 p.m., therefore, the Army despatched an order directing the IV. Corps to capture "not later "than Tuesday 27th November" the villages of Fontaine and Bourlon, the line to be consolidated being defined as extending along the northern slopes of the ridge beyond the two villages and Bourlon Wood[1]: the 2nd Division was placed under the IV. Corps forthwith. The III. Corps was to extend its left to a point in front of Cantaing; and as soon as they could be spared the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Divisions were to be withdrawn and revert to the Cavalry Corps which would keep one cavalry division in the forward concentration area near Fins.

26TH NOVEMBER

In the IV. Corps the day, which broke bright and fine with a cold wind, was devoted to plans and preparations for renewing the attack against the Bourlon position by the Guards and the 62nd Division on the morrow. The enemy, on his part, doubtless felt the need for recuperation; he made no counter-attack, although there was much sniping and machine-gun fire, whilst hostile shelling was heavy at intervals on some parts of the front and on Graincourt[2] and Anneux.

The R.F.C. bombed the crossings of the Sensée river, fighter escorts being increased because the arrival of Richthofen's "Circus", brought down from Flanders, had trebled the German fighter strength. Yet on this day the I. Brigade R.F.C. was withdrawn from the Third Army front to resume its routine work with the First Army.

At 10 a.m. the British heavy artillery began a deliberate bombardment of Fontaine, Quarry Wood, Moeuvres, Inchy and Sains, 6½ batteries of 6-inch howitzers, two of 9.2-inch and one of 12-inch being employed. Of these only 2½

[1] See Sketch 12.

[2] On this day a dug-out under the church at Graincourt was discovered to be heavily mined.

Digitized by Google

batteries of 6-inch howitzers fired on Fontaine,[1] so the effect was not all that could be desired; Bourlon village was left untouched on account of the British troops which might still be holding out there.[2]

Lieut.-Colonel Warden,[3] 13/East Surrey, did not withdraw from his stronghold on the south-eastern side of Bourlon village until the evening when the Germans opened upon the building with heavy trench-mortars. His companies were now occupying a position on the British barrage line selected for the attack next morning, so all were brought back to dug-outs in rear.[4]

A conference took place in the morning at 62nd Division headquarters at Havrincourt to discuss and settle the plan of attack. After Lieut.-General Woollcombe (IV. Corps), and Major-Generals Feilding (Guards Division) and Braithwaite (62nd Division) had been joined by General Byng, the Commander-in-Chief also arrived. He had decided that, owing to lack of means, no further offensive operations could be attempted, but seemed satisfied that the plan for the 27th offered every chance of securing the main object, which he described as "to capture and hold the best line "for the winter." He then rode off to view the battlefield from the Flesquières ridge.

In the meantime Major-General Feilding put forward his written objections to the plan: Fontaine was particularly well defended; the advance of the Guards would be exposed to artillery fire from the high ground north of Rumilly,[5] in addition to that of the German guns in the western outskirts of Cambrai and behind the Bourlon ridge; when it arrived upon its objective the Guards Division would have increased its frontage by eighteen hundred yards; he had only six fresh battalions available for the whole operation. In his view an assault upon the Rumilly position was an essential part of any attack intended to secure the Bourlon

[1] Major-General Feilding, commanding the Guards Division which was to attack the village on the 27th, had asked for the preparatory bombardment to be as heavy as possible.

[2] The capture of a prisoner of the *III/88th Reserve Regt.* south of the village revealed the presence of the *21st Reserve Div.* on the IV. Corps front.

[3] See page 147.

[4] The 13/E. Surrey did not withdraw from Bourlon Wood until noon on the 27th. Casualties in the battalion amounted to 6 officers and 223 other ranks.

[5] See Sketch A.

Digitized by Google

ridge; if resources were not sufficient for this it would be the best policy to withdraw from the low ground and establish a main line of defence on the Flesquières ridge. These representations made little impression upon General Byng, who decided that the attack must take place as planned. He was aware that the 47th Division, which had reached the Achiet le Petit area, behind Bapaume, on the 24th November, represented the last of the reinforcements he could expect, and that, whatever the fortunes of the morrow, the Third Army's offensive must be brought to an end.

At 5 p.m. was issued the formal operation order of the IV. Corps, the object being defined as "gaining all the ground "from which the enemy can observe our batteries and "taking the village of Fontaine": the Guards, with 12 tanks,[1] to attack Fontaine; the 62nd Division with 20 tanks,[2] to secure the northern part of Bourlon Wood and the village. It having been agreed that no assault against Fontaine from the south could succeed on account of flanking fire from la Folie Wood, the Guards were to attack eastward; and their objective included not only the village but also the north-eastern portion of Bourlon Wood.

The Guards Division was supported by six field artillery brigades,[3] and the C.R.A. (Br.-General F. A. Wilson) also had under his control a 6-inch howitzer battery, which was given targets in the northern part of Fontaine, and a 60-pdr. battery to fire on the road approaches within the German position. To the six field artillery brigades[4] under the C.R.A. 62nd Division (Br.-General A. T. Anderson) were added one 60-pdr. and two 6-inch howitzer batteries; their targets were to be selected points in the Marquion line and (for one of the howitzer batteries) Quarry Wood. Under corps control were four 6-inch howitzer batteries, one battery of 9.2-inch and one of 12-inch howitzers, which were to bombard the villages of Fontaine and Bourlon, Lock 4 and the Canal du Nord bridge near it, and Inchy; and six

[1] The III. Bde. Tank Corps detailed 9 from F and 4 from I Battalion.

[2] Seventeen from F and 3 from C Battalion (all III. Bde. Tank Corps).

[3] The divisional artilleries of the Guards and 51st Divs., with the LXX. and 306th Army Bdes., R.F.A. (108 18-pdrs., 36 4·5-inch hows.). An R.H.A. brigade of the 2nd Cav. Div. did not arrive in time to take part.

[4] Divisional artilleries of the 62nd and 40th Divs., LXXVII. Army Bde. R.F.A., V. Bde. R.H.A. (108 18-pdrs., 36 4.5-inch hows.).

Digitized by Google

siege and five heavy batteries were devoted to counter-battery work. Thus the total number of heavy and medium pieces would be 76.[1]. In addition, the III. Corps supplied a battery of 6-inch howitzers to assist in the bombardment of Fontaine. The corps also undertook to search la Folie Wood with fire, shell the bridges over the St. Quentin canal east of the wood, lay smoke on the western side of the high ground north of Rumilly, engage the German batteries about Proville (the south-western suburb of Cambrai), and carry out a diversionary bombardment on the Masnières front.[2] On the other flank there would be special bombardments by the field artillery of the 2nd Division, and by the VI. Corps, farther west.

Snow fell continuously during the night when certain reliefs and adjustments of the line were carried out to the accompaniment of bursts of machine-gun and artillery fire from a watchful enemy. The 6th Division of the III. Corps extended its left to a point in front of Cantaing, relieving the right of the Guards Division. The Guards had already taken over from the 186th Brigade (62nd Division) about five hundred yards of the front in the eastern portion of Bourlon Wood. The 2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira) relieved the 36th Division and, in the process, extended its right to the Marquion line, thus shortening the front of the 62nd Division by some 1,200 yards. In the sector near the Canal du Nord the newcomers took over Lock 5, but not Round Trench. The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Battalions on relief marched back to Metz, thus completing the concentration of the 1st Cavalry Division, the 9th Cavalry Battalion having already arrived.[3] The three battalions of the 2nd Cavalry Division came under the command of the 62nd Division, the 3rd and 4th Battalions moving to a position south-west of Graincourt where they were at the disposal of the 185th Brigade, whilst the 5th Battalion was placed in reserve at Flesquières.

The attack on Fontaine was to be made by the 2nd Guards Brigade whose commander, Br. General B. N. Sergison

[1] The number which could be brought into action was limited by the bad state of the roads which hampered ammunition supply in the forward areas.

[2] See Sketch A.

[3] The 1st Cav. Div. moved back to Bray on 27th Nov., returning from the IV. Corps to the Cavalry Corps.

Digitized by Google

Brooke, shared Major General Feilding's view as to the nature of the task. The brigade had to move up from Ribécourt. Guiding marks were obliterated by the snow which began to make movement difficult and exhausting, and it was very late before the battalions were in their assembly positions and companies could receive their orders. That they did arrive was a considerable achievement. There was, of course, no opportunity for reconnaissance or even to see the ground in daylight, and no chance to come to any understanding with the tanks which were to co-operate.

27TH NOVEMBER

The snow had turned to drizzling rain when, at 6.20 a.m. in the darkness just before dawn of the 27th November, began the last effort to secure complete possession of the Bourlon ridge.

In the Guards Division the assaulting battalions of the 2nd Guards Brigade (Br. General B. N. Sergison Brooke) faced eastward and north-eastward with the 3/Grenadier Guards on the right astride the Bapaume—Cambrai road, the 1/Coldstream Guards in the centre and the 2/Irish Guards on the left in Bourlon Wood. Punctually at zero hour the British barrage came down; it lifted 100 yards every five minutes and paused for half an hour in front of a north-south line through the centre of Fontaine which marked the first bound of the Grenadiers and Coldstream. The 3rd, 4th and 11th Machine-Gun Companies swept with their fire the ground east of the village, whilst four guns of the 7th Motor Machine-Gun Battery, from a position near Cantaing, covered the eastern exits.

The Guards did not wait for the tanks which were a little late in forming up but soon overtook the leading troops. Casualties from machine-gun and artillery fire were heavy almost from the start. The two companies of Grenadiers moving south of the Bapaume—Cambrai road were almost wiped out by machine-gun fire from the direction of la Folie Wood: all the officers and N.C.O.'s fell, save one sergeant who, with six men, fought his way through to Fontaine church. Here he joined some of the other two companies of the battalion which, in spite of the help the tanks had given them, had also suffered heavily. Thus, although the

Digitized by Google

Grenadiers had passed through half the village and reached their first objective by 7.15 a.m. they had not been able to clear the houses and cellars of the enemy. Germans were firing from trenches south of the road and from a derelict tank, whilst a machine-gun, sited to enfilade the sunken road from Cantaing, was still in action.

It was by this road that the 1/Scots Guards (2nd Guards Brigade), which was holding the right of the divisional front, sent one company to link up with the Grenadiers. This it could not do. Under deadly fire officers and men fell fast and the command soon passed to a sergeant who, however, proved himself a natural and very gallant leader.[1] Under his command the company beat off several counter-attacks and held on to a position in the sunken road until ordered to withdraw[2].

On the left of the Grenadiers the Coldstream, who started without the tanks, encountered an obstinate resistance at a quarry and at the houses in the northern part of Fontaine ; the battalion was also taken in flank by machine-gun fire from the north. After a number of fierce encounters in which many Germans were killed or taken the Coldstream arrived on their first objective, the company on the left having chased the enemy as far as the railway.

Eight tanks of F Battalion which entered Fontaine with the Grenadiers had been able to account for a number of machine-gun posts, but could do little towards clearing the village. All rallied, although one had received a direct hit and one had developed mechanical trouble. Of the four of I Battalion which were allotted to the Coldstream, one " bellied " on a tree-stump in Bourlon Wood, but the other three entered the northern part of Fontaine, where the German machine guns seemed particularly difficult to locate. One tank turned north across the railway and annihilated a large group of Germans who had been driven into the open. All three tanks returned.

Although the position of both Grenadiers and Coldstream was precarious so long as unsubdued Germans remained in Fontaine, and both battalions were very much reduced in

[1] Sergt. John McAulay, D.C.M., who, also, at great personal risk, carried his wounded company commander, and other wounded, to a place of safety. He was awarded the V.C.

[2] Casualties amounted to 4 officers and 73 other ranks, more than 50% of the company.

Digitized by Google

numbers, the advance to the final objective began punctually at 7.45 a.m. The movement was accomplished without much difficulty, the Coldstream capturing 50 men and two field guns at the station; but effective occupation of this extensive front east and north-east of Fontaine was another matter. There were gaps between the companies; and in rear, amongst the houses of Fontaine, the fighting flared up again as parties of the enemy emerged from shelter. Soon, too, the Coldstream were shelled out of the station and, although they occupied it again, the place proved untenable.

Meanwhile the 2/Irish Guards on the left had gone straight through to its final objective, fighting its way through the north-eastern part of Bourlon Wood. First a chain of the enemy's forward posts was encountered, but the Irishmen plunged forward through the undergrowth, bayoneting Germans who cowered under waterproof sheets in holes and trenches. Many prisoners were taken, and many were lost again through lack of men to guard them, for the battalion paid dearly for its progress to the north-eastern edge of the wood. Here, under shell and machine-gun fire, a line of posts was dug, in touch on the right with the Coldstream; but on the other flank, where the advance had been checked by fire from a strongpoint, the troops of the 186th Brigade were hard to discover.

Between 8.30 and 9 a.m. Br.-General Sergison-Brooke learnt that his three battalions had carried out their task but had suffered very heavy loss in doing so. He at once ordered the 4/Grenadier Guards (3rd Guards Brigade), in reserve near the south-eastern edge of the wood, to send one company to the 3rd Grenadiers, two to the Coldstream, and one to secure the left flank of the Irish Guards; also, he obtained the permission of the division to use the 1/Welsh Guards (3rd Guards Brigade) and ordered it to send two companies to occupy a portion of the jumping-off line.

The arrival of these inadequate reinforcements was, however, anticipated by the enemy who counter-attacked in considerable strength.[1] An advance from the direction of la Folie swept through the thin screen of posts established by the Grenadiers and Coldstream and entered Fontaine from the south-east, Germans emerging from cellars and

[1] The three Guards battalions, or what was left of them, had to meet the onslaught of some nine or ten German battalions. See Note at end of Chapter

Digitized by Google

houses to join the fight; an attack near the station was for the moment, repulsed by the Coldstream with difficulty; and the Irish Guards on the edge of Bourlon Wood were enveloped on both flanks by an assault which swept away the left company of the Coldstream. Almost surrounded, and soon reduced to little more than a number of isolated groups, the remnants of the battalions were ordered to withdraw. This they did deliberately, covering the movement with bursts of machine-gun and rifle fire, bringing in their prisoners, their own wounded borne by German stretcher-bearers.[1] The Coldstream were obliged to abandon the two field guns they had captured, but, before doing so, damaged them with grenades. Of the three battalions of the 2nd Guards Brigade, only two hundred Grenadiers, one hundred and eighty of the Coldstream, and eighty of the Irish Guards returned to the starting line.[2] The 4/Grenadier Guards which had come up checked every attempt of the Germans to advance from Fontaine, and by 1 p.m. the action on the front of the Guards Division was over. The only consolation was that very heavy toll had been taken of the enemy.

In consequence of the readjustments of the line the 62nd Division, on the left of the Guards, was enabled to reduce the frontage of each brigade to 1,000 yards. To each was attached a battalion of the reserve brigade, so there promised to be ample weight behind the attack. On the right the 186th Brigade (Br.-General R. B. Bradford, V.C.) was to clear the northern part of Bourlon Wood and the projecting eastern arm of the village, then occupying the line of the railway beyond. The objective of Br.-General R. O'B. Taylor's 187th Brigade on the left was the main portion of the village which was subjected to a special bombardment for one hour, commencing at zero, 6.20 a.m. The barrage, half shrapnel and half high-explosive, lifted 200 yards every ten minutes, but the ground was now so heavy that the infantry had difficulty in keeping pace. Nevertheless, all appeared to start well, although it was not easy to keep direction in the darkness among the trees.

[1] The prisoners belonged to the *II* and *III 46th Res. Regt.* and *II/46th Regt.* (*119th Div.*); and to the *I* and *II/1st Res. Ersatz Regt.*, the first identification of the *221st Div.* See Note at end of Chapter.

[2] More were collected later; the 2nd Guards Bde. returned a total of 38 officers and 1,043 other ranks, casualties during 26th–28th Nov.

Digitized by Google

The progress of the 2/5th Duke of Wellington's, right battalion of the 186th Brigade, was much hampered by the thick undergrowth, and fire from a German strongpoint on the right soon checked the advance on that flank. Actually, very little ground was gained by the battalion which was expected to go right through to the railway; and it was not until later in the day that touch was obtained with the left of the Guards. Next to the 2/5th, the 2/6th Duke of Wellington's had veered to the left and reached the eastern side of the main part of Bourlon village, instead of the eastern arm which was the battalion's objective. Coming up in rear and maintaining its direction, the 2/7th, which was to have passed through the 2/6th and reached the railway beyond, took on the task of its sister battalion in the eastern arm of Bourlon. Here it was greatly helped by three tanks of C battalion and one of F, for the machines took part in the capture of the factory building, patrolled the main street running east and west, and silenced a 4·2-inch howitzer battery with their 6-pdrs. The F Battalion tank was hit and set on fire but the other three rallied and, although some of the Lewis guns and one 6-pdr. had been put out of action, remained at hand till nearly nightfall in case of counter-attack.[1]

The 2/7th Duke's, however, could make no progress beyond the main street owing to the heavy fire coming from the railway where the enemy was strongly entrenched. Later, the 2/7th West Yorkshire (attached from the 185th Brigade) sent up three companies to fill a gap between the 2/7th and 2/5th Duke's. The troops were too exhausted for another effort, but the position of the brigade was by no means satisfactory, forming, as it did, a salient with the apex in the eastern arm of Bourlon village and the left in the area of the neighbouring brigade, the 187th. Following a German counter-attack which developed about 4.30 p.m., but made little impression, the 2/7th Duke's was brought back from the eastern end of Bourlon to the high ground in rear.

The assault of the 187th Brigade on Bourlon village was made by the 2/5th York & Lancaster and the 2/5th K.O.Y.L.I., following eleven tanks[2] of F Battalion. Four, with one company of the K.O.Y.L.I. were to cover the left

[1] The two male tanks expended, in all, 200 rounds of 6-pdr. ammunition.

[2] The twelfth developed mechanical trouble during the approach march.

Digitized by Google

flank by dealing with the machine-gun posts in the Marquion line. The tale is soon told. Tanks and infantry succeeded in entering Bourlon to find it a network of formidable defences little damaged by shell fire. Progress was blocked by strong barricades, stoutly defended; hidden field guns opened at short range; blasts of machine-gun fire seemed to come from all directions. The left flank detachment lost its bearings and failed in its mission so that the left of the K.O.Y.L.I. suffered grievously from enfilade fire, and although for two hours the fight in the village continued withdrawal became inevitable. Of the fifteen tanks engaged only five returned; five were known to have suffered direct hits and five others were seen no more. About 9.30 a.m. Br.-General Taylor was informed of the failure which could hardly be retrieved by renewing the assault in similar fashion. He at once took measures to ensure the possession of the crest of the ridge on the western side of the wood, bringing up the 2/5th W. Yorkshire (attached from the 185th Brigade) for this purpose. Later another of the West Yorkshire battalions was placed at his disposal.

In the afternoon, as soon as he was informed of the failure of the attack, General Byng gave to Lieut.-General Woollcombe, commanding the IV. Corps, verbal instructions, promptly confirmed in writing,[1] to cease his offensive as the Third Army's means were exhausted. The positions were to be consolidated, a defensive line on the Flesquières ridge was to be organized, and, third in importance, an intermediate line covering Graincourt constructed; the 47th and 59th Divisions were available to relieve the 62nd and Guards Divisions which could be retained, temporarily, in reserve; the tanks would be withdrawn. These instructions were approved by the Commander-in-Chief who sent Lieut.-General Kiggell to Third Army headquarters on this day.

So the struggle for the Bourlon position was brought to an end owing to lack of resources to renew it. None could view with satisfaction the events of the past seven days: so many attacks had failed, so many casualties had been suffered and so much hardship endured by the troops, in attempting to force a definite issue and to break a resistance of which the strength appeared to have been consistently

[1] See Appendix 15.

Digitized by Google

under-estimated. And as a result, although the highest part of the ridge, the wooded hill, had been won, the enemy still looked down from the shoulders of the ridge upon the British battery positions in the Cantaing—Anneux—Graincourt plain.

At night the Guards relieved their line with the few fresh troops available: the 1/Grenadier Guards and 1/Welsh Guards (3rd Guards Brigade), and three companies of the 2/Coldstream (1st Guards Brigade). Preparations were in hand for a divisional relief, but the 59th Division could not arrive for another 24 hours. On the front of the 62nd Division the 186th Brigade put the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Battalions (2nd Cavalry Division) into the line, moving back its own battalions to support positions in Bourlon Wood; and the 187th Brigade was relieved by the 185th which used the 4th Cavalry Battalion (2nd Cavalry Division) to hold its right sector. The 2nd Division, next on the left, kept troops at call in case the 62nd Division should have need of them.

In the VI. Corps, about the middle of the afternoon, the 56th Division holding the Hindenburg trenches at Tadpole Copse had had to meet a heavy counter-attack after a barrage had cut all communications; but the Germans were repulsed by the 1/12th London (Rangers) and the 1/13th London (Kensington) of the 168th Brigade.

NOTE

The Germans, 25th–27th November[1]

By the morning of the 25th November the northern half of the line held by the Arras Group had been taken over by the newly constituted Lewarde Group (*XVIII Corps*, General Albrecht), so that Moser was able to concentrate his attention upon the Bourlon front. As regards Bourlon Wood, the day was a disappointing one for the Germans: "in spite of all "endeavours the British cannot be driven out of the wood". The north and north-eastern slopes were held by the *9th Grenadiers* and *II/Lehr Regiment*, and before noon the *II/Guard Fusiliers* was sent up as reinforcement. At 2 p.m. the *I* and *II Guard Fusiliers*—the former advancing from Bourlon village—were

[1] Tankschlacht and Moser.

Digitized by Google

ordered to attack and gain the western edge of the wood, the *9th Grenadiers* and *II/Lehr Regiment* joining in. Several attempts were made until at last, about 8.30 p.m., failure was accepted and all troops were withdrawn to their starting lines.

On 26th November the Arras Group, with a front extending from Quéant to Bourlon Wood (inclusive), counted seven divisions (the *20th, 21st Reserve, 214th, 221st, 3rd Guard, 119th* and the *49th Reserve*).[1] The artillery consisted of 508, including 118 heavy, guns.

The arrival of the Guards to relieve the 51st Division was expected, owing to a wireless message having been intercepted, and a fresh British attack was considered to be imminent. On this day the *107th Division* returned to the line, coming in on the left of the *119*th. At Bourlon Wood adjustments and reorganization of the forward troops were disturbed by British action and a protective artillery barrage was called for. On the Canal du Nord front the *214th Division* was relieved by the *21st Reserve Division.*

At 6 a.m. on the 27th November the German batteries put down a barrage in expectation of attack. Soon afterwards the British artillery opened. Fontaine and Bourlon Wood were enveloped in smoke, so that the direction of the British advance was for some time, in doubt. Soon it was reported that the *9th Grenadiers* (*3rd Guard Division*) had been driven back from Bourlon Wood so the *119th Division,* on the Fontaine front, conformed, the village being evacuated except for the garrison of the church who took refuge in the crypt ; " but the machine-" gunners continued to embarrass the British ". Another account states that soon after 8 a.m. " great masses were retreat-" ing from Fontaine on Raillencourt ". The reserves ordered up included two battalions of the *227th Reserve Regiment* and part of the *52nd Reserve* (*107th Division*) and the *55th Reserve Regt.* (from the *220th Division* the bulk of which was south of Crèvecoeur). Led by the *II/46th Regiment* (*119th Division*) these troops counter-attacked from the north whilst the *II/58th Regiment* (*119th Division*) did so from the east.

Moser, commanding the Arras Group, thought the British had broken through at Fontaine and feared for his left flank; he had Bourlon Wood " ringed with artillery fire ", sent up the *221st Division,* and roused the *214th Division* in the Epinoy area

[1] The *221st Div.* had arrived from Flanders, and Moser had asked for the *119th,* in the line at Fontaine (Caudry Group), and the *49th Res.* then on its way from Flanders.

Digitized by Google

(4 miles north of Bourlon). About 10.40 a.m. the *60th Reserve Regiment* (*221st Division*) was led forward from Raillencourt, the *9th Grenadiers* (*3rd Guard Division*), which had given ground, being ordered to join in the advance made in conjunction with that of the *1st Reserve Ersatz Regiment* (*221st Division*) moving on the right flank of the counter-attack upon Fontaine. But the British defended themselves stoutly and " it did not come to a general forward movement in the area of " the *3rd Guard Division* ". The general confusion of units made the transmission of orders very difficult. At night the *3rd Guard Division* in the Bourlon Wood area was relieved by the *221st Division.*

The British attack on Bourlon village is said to have been completely repulsed by 10 a.m. when the fighting died down.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*)

(Sketch 13)

THE DEFENSIVE FRONT: 22ND–27TH NOVEMBER

On the flanks of the active battle-front, which, after the 21st November, extended only from Cantaing to Tadpole Copse (a mile west of Moeuvres), the divisions holding the remainder of the Third Army line were carrying out an arduous and somewhat thankless task. Their defences were thinly manned, for the Army was using all available troops for the attacks upon the Bourlon position, and their artillery had been reduced to provide the mass of guns required for the surprise attack of the 20th November.[1]

The subsidiary attacks, the bombardments, the raids, and the demonstrations of the 20th November had been continued to some extent on the following day. Unremitting vigilance was demanded in case of an enemy withdrawal, a contingency considered by Army headquarters as not unlikely to arise on any day at any part of the front. The examination of prisoners sometimes tended to heighten this suspicion, and there were reports of craters blown in the main roads behind the German lines. On the 22nd the XVII. Corps, astride the Scarpe in front of Arras, began a systematic programme of wire-cutting by artillery and trench-mortars for the double purpose of making the enemy apprehensive of attack and of clearing the way in readiness to follow up a withdrawal. This activity lasted until the 27th, whilst the R.E. services were occupied with the repair of forward roads and tracks, and the provision of advanced water supplies.

Nevertheless patrols found the opposing defences everywhere well manned and their garrisons either aggressive or " nervous ". As the days passed, belief in an enemy retreat became less and less justified; and it was obvious that a steady stream of German reinforcements was arriving in the areas south-east and north-west of Cambrai.

[1] On the 22nd the XVII. Corps received back from the III. Corps one 9·2-inch howitzer battery.

Digitized by Google

On the 22nd November the III. Corps issued instructions for consolidation which went into more detail than those sent out the night before, when the decision to revert to the defensive was announced.[1]

The main defensive line was to run from the VII. Corps boundary, at the Banteux ravine, along the Bonavis ridge to Lateau Wood (inclusive to the 12th Division); thence east of the main Cambrai road to the St. Quentin canal (20th Division); beyond the canal, taking in that part of the Masnières—Beaurevoir line in British possession and the spur west of Rumilly, to the lock opposite Marcoing station (29th Division); and thence on the near side of the canal north-westward behind Noyelles to the junction with the IV. Corps near Cantaing (6th Division). In front a series of posts was to be established; the captured Hindenburg support system was to be converted into a second line, its right on Lateau Wood.

Special tasks were laid upon each division. The 12th Division was responsible that Lateau Wood was strongly organized against attack from the north-east and north, and was ordered to push forward its line above Banteux in order to free the main Cambrai road from close-range machine-gun fire and obtain observation over the canal valley[2]. The 20th Division was called upon to establish forward posts in the canal bend opposite Crèvecoeur. The 29th Division was to convert the caves in Masnières into a defended locality, take an early opportunity to capture the spur east of Rumilly,[3] establish a strong bridgehead at Marcoing station, and make that portion of the village lying between canal and river into an "impassable obstacle". The 6th Division was to form an outpost line in front of Noyelles, dig a reserve line from Marcoing to Nine Wood, and entrench the Premy Chapel ridge as a defensive flank.

These four divisions which had carried out the corps attack of the 20th November were not relieved, and received

[1] See page 107; and, for the features of the III. Corps area in detail, Sketch 7.

[2] This matter of observation had been mentioned in III. Corps operation order for the 20th Nov. attack (Appendix 3). On that day, it will be remembered (see page 62) a British patrol had crossed the canal at Banteux and found the entire locality abandoned by the enemy; but unfortunately no advantage had been taken of this opportunity.

[3] Rumilly was subjected to a deliberate bombardment by 9·2-inch howitzers on the 22nd Nov.

Digitized by Google

no reinforcement.[1] The fighting strength of many battalions was low and there is no doubt that their efficiency was further impaired by the hard work, in bad weather, of consolidating the ground they had won and improving their communications.

In the 29th Division at 11 p.m. on the 23rd November the 1/Lancashire Fusiliers (86th Brigade) attempted to advance the line between Masnières and Rumilly by "peaceful penetration", but the movement was checked by machine-gun and rifle fire. Henceforward Masnières was heavily shelled by the enemy.

On the 24th the 12th Division made its first effort to push forward above Banteux. At 8 a.m. a company of the 5/R. Berkshire (35th Brigade) attacked and secured a strongpoint named Quarry Post, west of the village; the 8/Royal Fusiliers (36th Brigade) attacked the equally important Pelican Trench, north and north-west of Banteux and captured it, only to lose the centre portion by counter-attack. On the 25th the 7/R. Sussex (also 36th Brigade) made two efforts, one by day and one by night, to complete the capture of Pelican Trench but without success.[2]

28TH AND 29TH NOVEMBER: THE GENERAL SITUATION

The limited success achieved by the Cambrai offensive, now brought to a close, had resulted in the creation of a British salient, some nine miles wide and four miles deep, which was by no means easy to defend. The northern side and shoulder, represented by the IV. Corps front, lacked the security which it would have possessed if the whole of the Bourlon ridge had been won; but the corps was carrying out reliefs which would give it three fresh divisions in the line. Ample field artillery and a good proportion of the Third Army heavy guns supported them[3]. Moreover, the

[1] It is true that the 59th Div., last remaining division of the V. Corps, arrived in the Fins area on the 23rd Nov.; but on the 27th it was required to relieve the Guards before Fontaine and began to march northward at once.

[2] The 7/R. Sussex, which employed all four companies, lost 5 officers and 117 other ranks.

[3] Although the state of the roads and tracks prevented any considerable deployment of heavy artillery south of Bourlon Wood, most of the batteries were well placed on the western flank in the area Demicourt—Louveral—Morchies—Beaumetz.

Digitized by Google

right flank was covered to some extent by the 6th Division (left of the III. Corps), holding Cantaing and Noyelles.

The III. Corps was in a more difficult position. Next to the 6th, the front line of the 29th Division forming the right half of the face of the salient had the St. Quentin canal in its immediate rear and was overlooked from the high ground north of Rumilly and from the spur behind Crèvecoeur to the east.[1] At the south-eastern shoulder, covering the right and rear of the 29th Division beyond the canal, the 20th Division faced east and south-east, its front extending up the slope of the Bonavis ridge from the canal towards Lateau Wood; but even from the outpost line, which included the cemetery above les Rues des Vignes, only the roofs of some of the houses in the village could be seen and there was no view over the canal crossings. The 12th Division, holding the remainder of this side of the salient, was at a similar disadvantage as regards observation over the canal valley, the minor operations of the 24th and 25th November having failed of their purpose. This lack of observation was likely to be a severe handicap in the event of a German attack, particularly at the junction of the III. and VII. Corps on the northern edge of the Banteux ravine where the permanent trench system had been dislocated by the forcing back of the German front in the attack of the 20th November.[2]

Reports of the destruction by the enemy of all bridges between Crèvecoeur and Banteux may account for the fact that neither General Byng nor Lieut.-General Pulteney attached as much importance to the possession of the canal crossings as did Crown Prince Rupprecht.[3] Lieut.-General Snow, however, read correctly the increasing signs of

[1] See Sketch A.

[2] As early as the 3rd Nov., soon after the plans for the offensive were made known, the III. Corps had, indeed, pointed out in a memorandum to the VII. Corps the need for special precautions against counter-attack at this point when the defensive flank had been formed along the Bonavis ridge. Thereupon the VII. Corps staff had made a study of such a situation and of the best way to meet it.

[3] See Note at end of Chapter.
The commander of the III. Corps artillery subsequently stated that he did not anticipate an attack upon the corps front "as reports had come "in that all bridges between Crèvecoeur and Banteux were destroyed except "one, and it was not thought possible that the enemy had sufficient troops "at his disposal to make an attack over a large front. Besides, the 55th "Division on our right and Bourlon Wood on our left seemed the most "probable places for attack."

Digitized by Google

German preparation to attack, and held several discussions with his two divisional commanders, especially with Major-General H. S. Jeudwine whose 55th Division, on the left, was responsible for the defence of the Banteux ravine at the junction with the III. Corps.

There was no depth in the position, for the advance of the III. Corps on the 20th November had been north-eastward, whilst the 12th Division right division of the corps, now faced south-east; thus its communications ran almost parallel to its front before turning almost at right angles to approach it. The reserve area of the division actually lay in rear of the 55th Division which faced east, the corps boundary turning southward at a point only 500 yards behind the front line. Short of drastic alterations of boundaries and dispositions the defence of the Banteux ravine depended upon the co-operation of the III. Corps which had every tactical reason to afford it. Barely 1,500 yards west of the British front line in the ravine lay Gonnelieu with Gouzeaucourt another 2,500 yards in rear: these villages were used by the corps to accommodate troops and had not been organized as defended localities although many field and heavy batteries were in and around them.

As generally happens in the defence of a salient suitable battery positions were hard to find. Much of the III. Corps area was in full view of the high ground north of Rumilly and beyond Crèvecoeur, and many of the field batteries were uncomfortably close to the hostile artillery area on the south-east whence they were liable to be enfiladed, or even taken in reverse. The bulk of the heavy artillery could not be sited farther back than Villiers Guislain—Gouzeaucourt—Gonnelieu—la Vacquerie if it were to carry out effective counter-battery work, bombard the Crèvecoeur vicinity, and provide enfilade fire in front of Lateau Wood. Further restrictions as to choice of positions were imposed by the necessity for flash-cover and facilities for ammunition supply.

The VII. Corps had no troops or guns to spare for the purpose of strengthening its left flank; and its commander, knowing that the Third Army needed all its resources for the Bourlon attacks, had foreborne to ask for reinforcements. When Major-General Jeudwine, whose 55th Division held more than 9,000 yards of front (over 12,000 yards if measured along the trenches) had complained of his weakness in

Digitized by Google

artillery, all that could be done was to give him a battery of 18-pdrs. from the 24th Division on the right[1] to supplement his two field artillery brigades. All but two of the field howitzers belonging to the 55th Division were on counter-battery work: the corps heavy artillery consisted of eight 6-inch howitzers.

Lieut.-General Snow's own observations, made almost daily from the Ronssoy—Epéhy ridge, had confirmed the constant reports of his subordinate commanders concerning enemy movement in and behind the trenches, artillery registration, and activity in the air so aggressive as almost to prohibit R.F.C. reconnaissance. About the 25th November the corps commander had warned Major-Generals Jeudwine and Daly to be prepared for a German attack to be delivered on the 29th or 30th with its centre of gravity on the Banteux ravine. This accurate forecast made little impression upon Army or III. Corps headquarters.

The weather became milder on the 28th November, and on this and the succeeding days mist restricted both ground and air observation. In the IV. Corps on the night of the 28th/29th the 59th Division (Major-General C. F. Romer) completed the relief of the Guards facing Fontaine;[2] at the same time the 47th Division (Major-General Sir G. F. Gorringe) took over the Bourlon Wood position from the 62nd,[3] a harassing and somewhat costly operation conducted in a bombardment of gas shell. Major-General Gorringe who had found seven, or part of seven, battalions and 47 machine guns in the wood decided that this part of the line might well be thinned, in order to save gas casualties. He put in five battalions.

Although the 4th and 5th Cavalry Battalions were taken out, the 3rd Cavalry Battalion remained until the following night, so the 2nd Cavalry Division could not be fully concentrated in the Fins area before the 30th.[4]

[1] When borrowing the battery from Major-General A. C. Daly (G.O.C. 24th Div.) Lieut.-General Snow told him that he might not see it again. These words proved only too true.

[2] The casualties of the Guards Div. amounted to 55 officers and 1,263 other ranks.

[3] The casualties of the 62nd Div. during its second period in the battle were returned as 79 officers and 1,565 other ranks.

[4] A posthumous V.C. was awarded to Pte. G. W. Clare, 5th Lancers (3rd Cav. Bn), a stretcher bearer who was killed after displaying great gallantry during a gas bombardment. He manned a post single-handed after dressing the wounded amongst its occupants all of whom had become casualties; and, under heavy fire, he personally passed the gas alarm along a line of posts.

Digitized by Google

The 2nd Division, holding the IV. Corps front west of Bourlon Wood prepared a series of minor operations to improve the positions of its right brigade. At 6.25 a.m. on the 29th November two companies of the 1/K.R.R.C. (99th Brigade) delivered an attack which captured some posts in and east of the Hindenburg support system; the heavy casualties, amounting to 75 per cent. of the troops engaged, were caused, in the main, by the enemy's machine-gun fire.

In the VI. Corps on the night of the 29th/30th the 3rd Division extended its right eastward as far as the point where the defensive flank of the 56th Division joined the British front line north of Louveral.

During the 28th and 29th November the Third Army was informed by air and ground observers that there was much railway movement towards Cambrai from the north-west (Douai) and north-east (Denain), towards Busigny from the north-east (le Cateau), and farther south beyond Villiers Outreaux. Road transport in these areas was described as "above normal"; troop movements, artillery registration and aerial activity, were reported opposite the VII. Corps; and the working of a number of additional enemy wireless groups was detected. But many at General Byng's headquarters appear to have been deeply influenced by the opinion of G.H.Q. Intelligence that the enemy's losses in Flanders and in the Cambrai battle had exhausted him to such an extent that a heavy counter-offensive was hardly to be expected.

It is true that G.H.Q. expected an attack upon the Bourlon front, but had no doubt of the Third Army's capacity to cope with it; as for the VII. Corps, concerning which the Third Army betrayed so little anxiety, G.H.Q. relied upon the fact that the troops were holding the British original trench system which had long been organized for defence. Actually the 55th Division, in October, had taken over an extensive front consisting of a chain of posts with travel trenches; the wire was not very strong, more dug-outs were needed, no properly organized defensive system existed in rear. The division was too weak in numbers to cope satisfactorily with the work which required to be done: its lack of adequate artillery support has already been noticed.

Digitized by Google

On the 28th November the Third Army sent the 36th Division away to the area of the XVII. Corps which had instructions to be ready to follow up the Germans if they retreated to the Drocourt—Quéant line;[1] ordered V. Corps headquarters to relieve that of the IV. Corps on the Bourlon front, command to pass at 3 p.m. on the 30th; and allowed without protest the departure of the Ninth Wing R.F.C. which resumed routine bombing and reconnaissance operations north of the Third Army area.

Lieut.-General Snow, commanding the VII. Corps, had made another attempt to arouse Army headquarters to a sense of the emergency. At 7 p.m. on the 28th November Br.-General J. T. Burnett-Stuart (B.G.G.S. VII. Corps) telephoned Major-General L. Vaughan (General Byng's Chief of the Staff) whose record of the conversation reads as follows:

"B.G.G.S. VII. Corps rang up regarding unusual enemy "activity opposite their front. G.O.C. 55th Division thinks "enemy is going to attack. Discussed question and agreed "that an attack from north and south was a good and "likely operation from enemy point of view. VII. Corps "are in touch with III. Corps about it and are on the alert. "Told VII. Corps we would arrange to keep Guards handy "to help if required. Cavalry also could move up if wanted. "61st Division coming down on 30th."

This reassurance, if it could be regarded as such, was not followed by action. The Third Army issued no warning order, ordered no movement of reserves, took no steps to ensure that troops in the rear areas should be readily available. On two occasions the III. Corps, without result, had appealed to the Army for the relief of its tired divisions. Incidentally, the withdrawal from the III. Corps of two artillery brigades[2] was completed on the 29th November.

Of the divisions which were in reserve on this date the Guards, who had just been relieved, were around Havrincourt Wood at Metz—Trescault—Bertincourt, with their artillery and two machine-gun companies still in action on the Bourlon front; the 62nd Division, also lately from the line, was north-west of the Guards at Beaumetz—Lebucquière, with one brigade south-west of Graincourt; the

[1] The "Wotan Stellung" running due north from Quéant.

[2] XVI. Bde. R.H.A. and 277th Army Bde. R.F.A.

Digitized by Google

51st Division, under the V. Corps, was in the Baisieux area (about 24 miles W.S.W. of Havrincourt Wood); the 40th Division about Basseux (some 18 miles N.W. of Havrincourt Wood) was expecting to take over part of the VI. Corps line; the 36th Division had arrived in the XVII. Corps area and was under orders to join the First Army; the 61st Division, having been taken out of the XVII. Corps front was about to move to the V. Corps. As we know, the 2nd Cavalry Division had not yet concentrated about Fins. The remainder of the Cavalry Corps was back in its rear areas, the nearest division to the battlefront being the 5th around Monchy Lagache (9 miles south of Villers Faucon); but the 4th Cavalry Division, situated in the Athies area (11 miles south-west of Villers Faucon) was under orders to begin the relief of the 24th Division (VII. Corps) by the Cavalry Corps. Advanced parties of the 4th Cavalry Division were, indeed, leaving for the trenches.

The three tank brigades were less ready for action than any of the other arms: their move to winter quarters at Méaulte (18 miles S.W. of Havrincourt Wood) had already begun, and neither officers nor men suspected that they would be called upon to fight again before the spring. In the I. Tank Brigade at Havrincourt Wood, headquarters and battalion commanders, with all lorries, had already left, whilst the tanks, in various stages of overhaul, were preparing for entrainment. The crews of the II. Tank Brigade, just east of Fins, were either bathing or on fatigues. The III. Tank Brigade was in process of moving from Ribécourt to entrain at Sorel. At Bertincourt station were 48 new tanks, each with a driver and two men as reinforcement, which had not yet been issued to brigades.

If the IV. Corps took no special precautions,[1] the divisions holding the front, where the fighting had just died down and the enemy's artillery was becoming more and more active, were certainly on the alert. In the III. Corps, which had allowed some of its troops and commanders to assume that a period of normal trench-warfare had set in, Br.-General C. G. Fuller, Lieut.-General Pulteney's Chief General Staff Officer, visited the brigade commanders to impress upon them the need for vigilance; but no warning order was issued. Major-General de Lisle, commanding the 29th Division,

[1] Corps advanced headquarters withdrew from Metz on the 29th Nov.

Digitized by Google

shared the opinion that the Germans were too weak to undertake a major operation. He was, however, impressed by the remarks to the opposite effect of Lieut.-General Snow whom he met by chance on the afternoon of the 29th November when on his way to III. Corps headquarters.

As early as the 26th, Major-General A. B. Scott, 12th Division, had received a verbal message concerning the likelihood of a German attack from Br.-General B. Vincent whose 35th Brigade held the right sector next to the 55th Division (VII. Corps). Br.-General Vincent was well placed to observe all the indications which were so obvious from the 55th Division front. He repeated his warning over the telephone on the 29th, whereupon Major-General Scott ordered the 6/Queens (37th Brigade) and 11/Middlesex (36th Brigade), which were in divisional reserve at and behind Heudicourt, to be prepared to move up to Vaucelette Farm (a mile south-west of Villers Guislain and actually in the VII. Corps area) and to Quentin Mill (in front of Gouzeaucourt) respectively. In the afternoon certain of the 10 per cent. battle surplus of battalions and of newly-arrived divisional reinforcements at Heudicourt were organized as a battalion, 850 strong, under Major W. R. Johnson, 9/Essex. The 35th Brigade was informed that the 7/Suffolk (in brigade reserve in the old British front line south-east of Gonnelieu) might have to counter-attack southward towards Villers Guislain. These precautionary measures were to prove of great value when the enemy attacked; but they did not have the effect of cancelling the Suffolk working parties arranged by the division for the night of the 29th/30th; nor of altering the trench routine of the brigades holding the centre and left sectors in the 12th Division front.[1]

Major-General Jeudwine, commanding the 55th Division, visited Major-General Scott on the 29th November to see what co-operation could be expected for the defence of the Banteux ravine, where the northern slope had been newly entrenched by the left battalion of the 166th Brigade. The first-named commander had been led to believe that the 12th Division possessed a reserve brigade which would be available for counter-attack. This, of course, was not so; the commander of the 55th Division had, therefore, to do the

[1] The 7/R. Sussex (36th Bde.), in support near la Vacquerie, had brought forward its battle surplus which had been withdrawn for the 20th Nov. offensive, had sent for its cookers, and had ordered training to begin.

Digitized by Google

best he could with his own slender resources. He sent one battalion, the 1/4th Loyal N. Lancashire, of his weak reserve brigade[1] to Vaucelette Farm and Ste. Emilie (east of the railway, behind Ronssoy), and another, the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers to Villers Faucon ; and he put four extra machine-guns from reserve into Villers Guislain. These machine guns only arrived after darkness had fallen on the 29th November. Four of the VII. Corps 6-inch howitzers were in the village which had not been converted into a defended locality ; it was on a forward slope and very susceptible to bombardment from the north-east.

As regards artillery assistance, the C.R.A's. of the 55th and 12th Divisions had arranged that at 6.30 a.m. on the 30th the III. Corps heavy batteries (50th Heavy Artillery Group) in and about Gouzeaucourt[2] should open intense fire on the obvious German assembly positions south of Banteux ; but when the III. Corps was consulted and VII. Corps headquarters did their best to get this arrangement confirmed some misunderstanding arose. The VII. Corps believed that the III. had refused to allow the guns to open as requested ; the III. Corps was left with the impression that fire was not required unless called for at the time by the VII. Corps, or the S.O.S. was sent up from the British front. Six field batteries, also of the 12th Division, which could enfilade the front of the 166th Brigade (left sector of the 55th Division) would then assist, in addition to the heavy howitzers.

The 87th Brigade, holding the left sector of the 29th Division, reported that the 29th November was an " unusually " quiet day ", and the 88th Brigade, in reserve at Marcoing, observed that enemy aeroplanes were very active. The evening report of the III. Corps spoke of the heavy shelling of the Banteux spur, the Cambrai main road, battery positions south and south-west of Marcoing, and of Masnières ; enemy train and road traffic was above normal.

---

[1] The 164th Bde. (Br.-Gen. C. I. Stockwell) which, having sustained considerable loss in the Gillemont Farm action of the 20th Nov., now mustered barely fourteen hundred rifles.

[2] These were under the 12th Div. They comprised four 9·2-inch, eight 8-inch and four 6-inch howitzers. There was also a battery of six 60 pdrs. A battery of six 6-inch howitzers at la Vacquerie also belonged to the Group whose S.O.S. targets included certain canal bridges, the approaches to the Banteux ravine, and Honnecourt Wood.

Digitized by Google

Shortly before 2 a.m. on the 30th November Lieut.-Colonel E. R. Burne, commanding the XV. Brigade R.H.A. (29th Division), asked the III. Corps heavy artillery to put down a concentration upon Crèvecoeur and the canal crossings in that vicinity; but this request produced no action.

During the night the reserve brigade (16th) of the 6th Division was fully employed on roads and other tasks. In the 20th Division the 61st Brigade, holding the left sector, was relieving its two forward battalions and making arrangements for taking over 1,000 yards of the right sector where the 60th Brigade was in process of being relieved by the 59th.

The VII. Corps maintained its special state of readiness. A warning order issued by the 55th Division for the night of the 28th/29th November provided for special patrols, bursts of artillery fire on selected targets from 5 a.m. onward, plans for counter-attack, and the movement of reserves.[1] This order remained in force for the night of the 29th/30th November and on the evening of the 29th the following message was sent out from battalion headquarters to all companies of the 1/5th S. Lancashire (166th Brigade) which held about 2,000 yards of front including the trench across the Banteux ravine:

> "In the event of attack you will hold the line at all "costs. There is to be no retirement to any second "line. Warn all ranks to be specially alert."

The German Plans for the Counter-Stroke[2]

On the evening of the 23rd a new command called the Busigny Group (*XXIII. Reserve Corps*, General von Kathen) was constituted opposite the British VII. Corps, south of the Caudry Group. The *5th Guard Division* from the Aisne began to come into the line in the Bellicourt—le Catelet sector; the *34th Division* from Laon appeared south of Banteux as right division of the Busigny Group; and the *220th Division* from Flanders arrived opposite Bonavis (Caudry Group). The *30th Division* from Laon, already had troops in the line near Crèvecoeur (Caudry Group).

---

[1] See Appendix 16.

[2] Mainly from G.O.A. xiii., Rupprecht, Ludendorff, Moser and German operation orders.

Digitized by Google

Next morning preparations began in earnest for an offensive to be delivered " at an early date " by the Busigny (Kathen), Caudry (Watter), and Arras (Moser) Groups, and the *Second Army* (Marwitz) issued its first operation order which outlined the general plan. On the night of the 24th the *28th Division* from Laon arrived north of Banteux to become left division of the Caudry Group.

On the morning of the 25th the newly formed Lewarde Group (*XVIII. Corps*, Albrecht) had taken over the northern half of the Arras Group frontage, so that Moser's command extended eastward from Quéant on the right ; and as the *Second Army* gave him the *119th Division*, holding Fontaine, his left now reached almost to the St. Quentin canal.

Rupprecht conferred with Ludendorff at le Cateau (headquarters of the *Second Army*) on the 27th, the Chiefs of Staff of the German Crown Prince's Group of Armies and of the *Seventh Army* being summoned to attend. Rupprecht states that his provision of the *9th Bavarian Reserve Division* and the *185th Division*, sent from the *Fourth Army* in Flanders[1] first gave Ludendorff the idea of rolling up the British salient towards the north (the additional troops, it is to be supposed, providing sufficient extra weight for such an enterprise) : " there has never been such an " opportunity ". Rupprecht regretted that the attack could not be launched before the 30th, being afraid that the British might yet drive back the German detachments holding the bridgeheads south of Crèvecoeur ; in his opinion it was fortunate that the British attacks were confined to the Bourlon front and he hoped that they would continue for a few days longer.

From le Cateau Ludendorff, accompanied by Kuhl, Rupprecht's Chief of the Staff, went on to Tournai where there was a consultation with Lossberg, Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*. In the evening of the 27th Rupprecht confirmed previous instructions by issuing the following order to the *Second Army :*

1. Attack on 30th November.

2. Main blow by Eastern Groups, general direction Metz, capturing Flesquières and Havrincourt Wood from the south in order to take the British in flank and rear.

[1] These divisions arrived on the 28th and 29th Nov.

Digitized by Google

3. Attack of Arras Group to be delivered after main stroke of Eastern Groups has become effective by all the forces available from west of Bourlon Wood towards the south. Recommended that Arras Group begin artillery fire and demonstrations as early as possible in order to pin down enemy forces on its front.

4. For exploitation of success the Group of Armies (Rupprecht's) and O.H.L. will prepare fresh divisions for moving up.

5. In case of a great success subsidiary attack north of St. Quentin, prepared by *Second Army* will be ready.

On the 28th Moser began his preparatory bombardment by shelling Bourlon Wood with gas; in all 16,000 rounds of field gun ammunition were used for this purpose.

A *Second Army* operation order issued on the 29th November explained that the main attack would be made by the inner flanks of the Busigny and Caudry Groups (*34th* and *28th Divisions*) which must keep in close touch and move due west. The flanks must be protected by the *208th*[1] and *183rd Divisions* (Busigny) attacking on the south, and the *220th* and *30th Divisions* (Caudry), followed by the *9th Reserve Division*, on the north. After these attacks had become effective a strong assault by the Arras Group would be pushed towards Flesquières—Havrincourt. Army instructions were for a short artillery preparation[2] with the use of gas and smoke shell, the latter especially on O.P.'s and in the barrage; guns with strengthened teams were to accompany the infantry not only for anti-tank action but also to afford close support to the infantry attack. The first waves of the infantry were to pass round villages and other defended localities which were only to be assaulted frontally when already threatened from flank and rear.

Rupprecht regarded the re-capture of the Hindenburg front system as the minimum to be achieved. The British, he observes, must have been aware of increased movement and activity during the last days of November, but nothing was done to disturb the German preparations. The night of the 29th/30th November was a quiet one and the assembly was not interfered with by any hostile action.

[1] Arrived from St. Mihiel on the 27th Nov.

[2] It was to vary from 30 minutes to one hour, on different parts of the front.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917
(*continued*)

THE GERMAN COUNTER-STROKE

30TH NOVEMBER

(Sketch 14)

VII. CORPS: LOSS OF VILLERS GUISLAIN

At 5.30 a.m., before day broke on the 30th November, all troops of the VII. Corps stood to arms, the artillery carrying out a short bombardment of the German trenches in the neighbourhood of Vendhuille. When the fire ceased all was quiet. Patrols had not been able to detect any sign of a forward movement by the enemy. It was still dark when, soon after 6 a.m., the German guns opened so gradually that British observers were, for a while, in doubt as to whether the bombardment was indeed the prelude to an assault. The fire was directed principally upon the 55th Division (Major-General H. S. Jeudwine) whose defences, on the forward slopes of the spurs running eastward from the high ground about Ronssoy—Lempire and Epéhy—Peizière, commanded the valleys between, the St. Quentin canal being nowhere less than a thousand yards distant from the British front line.

The bombardment, in which gas shell was mixed with high explosive, grew heavier, cutting all rear communications. In the forward defences many machine guns and Lewis guns with their detachments were blown up or buried by the fire of heavy trench mortars.[1] The morning was dark, with a mist which lay thick in the valleys so that no signs of the German assembly could be discovered by the special reconnaissance patrols of the R.F.C. At 7.5 a.m.[2] the first S.O.S. was seen, and five minutes later the signals

[1] The *34th Div.*, attacking from Honnecourt, is stated to have had the support of seven *Minenwerfer* companies in addition to light mortars; its artillery consisted of six field-gun and six field-howitzer batteries, with nine 5.9-inch howitzer batteries added.

[2] The sun did not rise until 7.43 a.m.

Digitized by Google

were fired all along the front of the 55th Division. The VII. Corps batteries opened promptly, but the guns and howitzers were too few in number either to impede the attack or encourage the defence. It is no matter for surprise that infantry survivors complained of the lack of artillery support.

Preceded by patrols the Germans had advanced at 7 a.m. in small columns bearing many light machine guns and, in some cases, flame-throwers. From overhead, low-flying aeroplanes, in greater numbers than had hitherto been seen, bombed and machine-gunned the British defenders, causing further casualties and, especially, distraction at the critical moment. Nevertheless few posts appear to have been attacked from the front, the assault sweeping in between to envelope them from flanks and rear.

Although the hostile bombardment now extended along the whole corps front no infantry attack was made against the 24th Division (Major-Gen. A. C. Daly) in the right sector; nor was the 1/7th King's of the 165th Brigade (Br.-General L. B. Boyd Moss) opposite Gillemont Farm involved.[1] A frontal attack upon Fleeceall Post, held by the 1/5th King's the centre battalion of the 165th Brigade, failed; it was Eagle Quarry, opposite Vendhuille which marked the southern limit of the German break-in. Here the *Minenwerfer* bombardment had almost obliterated the defences; the remains of the garrison, belonging to the 1/6th King's, left battalion of the 165th Brigade, fought on in isolated groups until their ammunition was spent. Meanwhile the Germans had reached Little Priel Farm to encounter a dogged resistance among the buildings and the supporting posts near by; the farm, although lost, was re-occupied later in the morning, and on the left of the 1/6th King's the enemy got no further than the post called Holt's Bank.[2]

A factor in the resistance offered to the Germans was the effective fire, often at point-blank range, of a section of D/276th Battery, commanded by Sergt. C. E. Gourley, which was in action close to Little Priel Farm. Heavy

[1] According to the orders of the Busigny Group the *5th Guard Div.* was to make a holding attack against the front Malakoff Farm—Gillemont Farm; but the failure on the immediate right of this locality appears to have discouraged any such movement.

[2] Some prisoners of the *418th Regt.* (*183rd Div.*) were taken.

Digitized by Google

shelling drove the detachments to shelter, but the sergeant, bringing a man to assist him, returned time after time to open fire with one or other of the howitzers. This was done under aeroplane attack, machine-gun and rifle fire from the flanks, and on one occasion under a deluge of 4·2-inch shells directed by air observation. At noon a howitzer was run out of its pit to open fire with deadly effect at 400 yards range on German infantry attempting to advance from Holt's Bank.[1]

Next to the 165th Brigade, three battalions of the 166th Brigade (Br.-General F. G. Lewis), which held the remainder of the divisional front, received nearly the full force of the German blow. On the right the 1/10th King's (Liverpool Scottish) was forced back to the posts in the support position after the strongpoint at Pigeon Quarry, where its left flank rested, had been knocked to pieces by a concentrated bombardment and then enveloped from the north. The fight was maintained in Kildare Post and also in Limerick and Meath Posts which were manned by part of the 1/5th King's Own, support battalion of the brigade.[2] Eventually the garrison of Kildare was compelled to withdraw southward to a position where it was in touch with some of the 1/6th King's (165th Brigade) west of Little Priel Farm. Meath held out until the afternoon. At Limerick Post a mixed party of the 1/10th King's, 1/5th King's Own and 1/5th L.N. Lancashire, under the command of Captain J. A. Roddick (1/10th King's) repulsed all attacks.

In the centre of the brigade front three companies of the 1/5th L.N. Lancashire, very weak in numbers, held on to their front and support positions for more than an hour. Few men of these companies escaped, for they were cut off by the Germans who had entered Villers Guislain in their rear; battalion headquarters and the reserve company fell back fighting to Fourteen Willows Road which ran south from Villers Guislain to Peizière. The commanding officer, Major G. D. Morton, was wounded.

It was on the extreme left of the division and the corps, at the Banteux ravine, that the enemy made his earliest and most dangerous inroad, threatening for a time, to cut right

[1] Sergt. Gourley, who succeeded in withdrawing the section after darkness had fallen, was awarded the V.C.

[2] Here were taken more prisoners belonging to the *418th Regt.* (*183rd Div.*).

Digitized by Google

across the base of the salient as he had planned to do. The left battalion of the 166th Brigade, the 1/5th S. Lancashire, held a frontage of over 2,000 yards which included the Banteux ravine. In the firing line the scattered posts, with their immediate supports, absorbed practically the whole of the battalion strength; two weak platoons of the 1/5th King's Own formed its only reserve. The left company, in the ravine north of Turner Crater, was overwhelmed by the onrush of the left of the *34th Division*[1] which was then able to turn left-handed and approach Villers Guislain from the north-east almost unopposed. The remainder of the S. Lancashire resisted stubbornly until all ammunition was spent; and whilst the fight in front continued battalion headquarters in rear was attacked. The commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel C. P. James, endeavoured to fight his way clear with the headquarters personnel, but, after liberating 30 British prisoners who were on their way back from Villers Guislain, he was wounded and captured. Of the South Lancashire barely a man survived.

In Villers Guislain, which was shelled with gas and high-explosive from 6.45 a.m. onwards, the batteries of the 55th Division and the VII. Corps[2] had been firing on their S.O.S. lines since 7.5 a.m. Also in and about the village was the 34th Heavy Artillery Group (III. Corps) and two field batteries of the 12th Division,[3] which had opened soon afterwards, the 60-pdrs. on the roads leading into Honnecourt from the east and the 6-inch howitzers on the canal crossings southward from les Rues des Vignes. The German infantry, which was able to maintain effective control over its protective artillery barrage by means of light signals, appeared suddenly through the mist, advancing confidently up the slope into the village from the north-east before 8 a.m.[4] Such field guns as could be brought to bear fired over open sights at this new target until the detachments,

---

[1] *145th Regt.* which had for objective the northern part of Villers Guislain —Gauche Wood—Sorel. " Regt. No. 67 ".

[2] 210th Siege Bty.; B (5 guns) C (3 guns) A and D Batteries, 275th Bde. R.F.A.; A/107th Bty. R.F.A. (from 24th Div.).

[3] 32nd, 38th, 102nd and 216th Siege Batteries and 4 guns of the 71st Heavy Bty.; 376th and 378th Batteries 169th Army Bde. R.F.A.

[4] " Regt. No. 67 " states that when the infantry approached Villers Guislain no more British defences were encountered. " It reminded one " of the mobile warfare of 1914 ".

Digitized by Google

which had suffered heavy casualties, were forced to retire.[1] This was done deliberately, dial sights and breech-blocks being carried away. In Villers Guislain the VII. Corps lost four 6-inch howitzers, fourteen 18-pdrs., and four field howitzers; the III. Corps twenty 6-inch howitzers, four 60-pdrs., and twelve 18-pdrs.

Although information from the front line was meagre, and somewhat conflicting, Major-General Jeudwine, commander of the 55th Division, soon realized not only that the expected attack had come but that nearly the whole of his front was in a critical situation. It was essential that the high ground at Ronssoy—Lempire and Epéhy—Peizière should be held securely, and he lost no time in taking such measures as were within the means at his disposal. The 1/9th King's (reserve battalion of the 165th Brigade), occupying the posts on the eastward side of Lempire, was moved round to dig in north of the village and replaced by a company of the 1/4th S. Lancashire (Pioneers), the 423rd Field Company R.E., and working parties of the 180th Tunnelling Company R.E. Br.-General C. I. Stockwell's 164th Brigade[2]—numbering less than 1,400 rifles—was brought forward from reserve to build up, with all other available combatant troops, a line of resistance extending from the left of the 1/9th King's.

The 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, placed under the orders of the 165th Brigade, moved at 9 a.m. and, early in the afternoon, was entrenching a position on the left of the 1/9th King's from Lempire to Malassise Farm. The 1/4th S. Lancashire (Pioneers), less one company, with the 419th and 422nd Field Companies R.E., arrived later from Villers Faucon, to extend the line beyond the farm. Earliest of all, the 1/4th King's Own had moved at 8.30 a.m. to reinforce the right of the 166th Brigade; passing Epéhy, the battalion pushed on north-eastward and, about 11 a.m., dug in some

[1] German prisoners afterwards commented on the way that one battery continued to fire shrapnel, with fuzes set at zero, until the last possible moment.

[2] The position of the 164th Brigade at dawn was:
Bde. H.Q.: Tincourt (3 miles S.W. of Villers Faucon).
1/8th King's: Hamel (adjoining Tincourt).
1/4th King's Own: Longavesnes.
2/5th Lancs. Fus.: Villers Faucon.
1/4 L.N. Lancs. (under 166th Bde.): Vaucelette Farm, less one coy. at Ste. Emilie.

Digitized by Google

five hundred yards in rear of the refused flank held by the survivors of the 1/5th King's Own, 1/5th L.N. Lancashire and 1/10th King's who were still heavily engaged. Farther ahead Limerick Post was resisting stoutly and Meath was not yet subdued. The remaining battalion, 1/8th King's (Liverpool Irish), of the 164th Brigade began to arrive about 1.30 p.m. and prolonged the line from the left of the 1/4th King's Own, discovering on its other flank the dismounted squadrons of the Northumberland Hussars (III. Corps cavalry regiment) which had appeared in position near the railway south of Vaucelette Farm.

At Vaucelette Farm the 1/4th L.N. Lancashire had already been engaged. About 8.30 a.m. it had opened fire on Germans emerging from Villers Guislain to occupy Villers Hill, south of the village. In order to stem the enemy's advance south-westward the battalion commander, Lieut.-Colonel R. Hindle, ordered a counter-attack at 11 a.m., when the three weak companies, unsupported, were launched at Villers Hill, the men firing from the hip as they moved forward. Taken by surprise at this boldness the Germans fell back, and the hill was nearly won[1] when fresh waves of enemy infantry appeared on the sky-line. Lieut.-Colonel Hindle was killed and the three company commanders were hit, so the adjutant conducted a fighting withdrawal to the farm. Losses had been heavy, but the Germans did not follow up beyond the beet factory at the foot of the hill and the 6/Queens (37th Brigade), followed by Major Johnson's battalion now arrived.[2] These troops, with the 11/Middlesex (36th Brigade), forming the reserve of the 12th Division, had been moved forward from Heudicourt. From Vaucelette Farm the line was now continued into the III. Corps area at Chapel Hill by the 6/Queen's in touch with other troops whose arrival will be related in due course. The 164th Machine-Gun Company found positions for its guns between Malassise Farm and Vaucelette Farm, and the centre and left of the 55th Division, by the late afternoon, was thus established on a new, if very thinly held, front. For the moment, at least, it seemed that the advance of the Germans was stopped: they had captured the British second position from Little Priel Farm to Villers Guislain, but had not yet subdued all resistance in that line.

[1] Some prisoners of the *25th Regt.* (*208th Div.*) were taken.

[2] See page 171.

Digitized by Google

Major-General Jeudwine, however, had no more troops to put in and the corps could do little to help. Holding the right sector of the corps front, the 24th Division, which was under a bombardment of gas and high explosive, might yet be called upon to meet an attack: all three brigades were in line, and each brigade had one battalion in divisional reserve. Lieut.-General Snow requisitioned two of these battalions for the support of the 55th Division, the 13/Middlesex (73rd Brigade) being sent up to reinforce the 1/8th Kings, north-east of Epéhy, whilst the 8/Queen's (72nd Brigade) was used later, north of Lempire, to relieve the 1/9th King's which then moved forward to reinforce the 1/6th King's (165th Brigade) west of Little Priel Farm.[1] The corps warned the 24th Division to be prepared, should need arise, to withdraw three battalions from the line.

At 9 a.m. Lieut.-General Snow made his first effort to obtain reinforcements. The nearest troops were those of the 2nd Cavalry Division, around Fins, and the remainder of the Cavalry Corps, if much farther away, were, at any rate, behind the VII. Corps area.[2] He therefore asked the Third Army to send one cavalry division to Villers Faucon. This was approved, and Lieut.-General Kavanagh, commanding the Cavalry Corps, accordingly ordered the 5th Cavalry Division to move. Other measures taken at this time by the VII. Corps were to order all villages in the corps area to be organized for defence and to stop the relief of the 24th Division by the 4th Cavalry Division. At 9.30 a.m. Lieut.-General Snow asked the Army to direct the Guards Division on Heudicourt in rear of his left and this also was approved; but he was soon informed that the Guards had been placed under the III. Corps. The VII. Corps was thus left to its own resources, and to such help as the cavalry might bring.

[1] The other battalion in reserve to the 24th Div., 3/Rifle Brigade (17th Bde.) was moved to a position in the left rear of the divisional sector, 1½ miles south of Ste. Emilie.

[2] 5th Cav. Div.: Monchy—Lagache, 9 miles S. of Villers Faucon.
4th Cav. Div.: Athies, 10 miles S.S.W. of Villers Faucon.
1st Cav. Div.: Bray, 18 miles W.S.W. of Villers Faucon.
3rd Cav. Div.: Contay—Querrieu, 25 miles S.W. and W.S.W. of Villers Faucon.
Cav. Corps H.Q. were at Villers Carbonnel, 11 miles S.W. of Villers Faucon.
Some brigades of the 4th and 5th Cav. Divs. were out exercising their horses at this time.

Digitized by Google

Lieut.-General Kavanagh, who established his headquarters at Villers Faucon at 10.45 a.m., ordered the 4th Cavalry Division to follow the 5th to Villers Faucon and, with the sanction of the Army, arranged for the two divisions to deliver a counter-attack against the German flank, Villers Guislain—Gouzeaucourt[1]. It had already become clear that the enemy's main thrust was directed towards Metz. The Army placed the 2nd Cavalry Division, at Fins, under the III. Corps, but its artillery was sent to the 55th Division. The 1st Cavalry Division was ordered to Bossu, six miles south-west of Villers Faucon.

Lieut.-General Snow summarized the situation and the measures he had taken in a telegram to the Army sent at 12.35 p.m. He still had no prospect of early reinforcement although the counter-attack to be delivered by the two cavalry divisions might ease the situation on his left flank. The head of the 5th Cavalry Division (Major-General H. J. M. Macandrew) had arrived west of Villers Faucon at 12.15 p.m. and early in the afternoon the leading brigade advanced, moving west of Epéhy and Vaucelette Farm to attack Gauche Wood, the first objective, from the south-west.

From the front of the 55th Division came reports of shelling and of enemy movement, suggesting preparations for a renewal of the German attack under cover of numbers of low-flying aeroplanes which were again becoming active. About 3.30 p.m. the S.O.S. signal was fired from the direction of Little Priel Farm, but the enemy made no attempt to advance. The new British line was strengthened by sending up battalion transport details and the corps cyclist battalion, and at 10.30 p.m. Vaucelette Farm was handed over to the III. Corps. It then became possible to relieve the 1/4th King's Own and the 13/Middlesex who withdrew to dug-outs along the railway south-west of the farm where they constituted a small reserve.

During the afternoon the Army definitely allotted reinforcements to the VII. Corps: the 1st Cavalry Division

[1] The Cavalry Corps order, issued at 1.10 p.m. ran as follows: "The "Cavalry Corps will advance in a northerly direction with a view to "attacking the enemy's flank between Villers Guislain and Gouzeaucourt "and seizing the Gonnelieu ridge. The 5th Cavalry Division will move "at once with the objective the enemy's flank between Villers Guislain "and Gouzeaucourt. It will be supported by the 4th Cavalry Brigade "in accordance with the situation as it develops".

Digitized by Google

which Lieut.-General Snow ordered to push on to Roisel that night[1]; the 21st Division, from the First Army, due to arrive by tactical trains at Tincourt from 3 a.m. onward next morning; and the 3rd Cavalry Division, for use dismounted if required, which would reach Bernes (five miles south of Villers Faucon) next morning. Meanwhile the bulk of the 4th Cavalry Division, not yet engaged, remained near at hand: the Mhow Brigade just north of Ste. Emilie and the Sialkot Brigade north-west of Villers Faucon. The Mhow Brigade was detached to reinforce the 166th Brigade at need; later, Lieut.-General Snow arranged with the III. Corps that the whole division should remain in his area, if the situation allowed, until the 21st Division began to appear.

At 9.10 p.m. a VII. Corps order enjoined the 55th Division to consolidate its new line of resistance and announced that by 9 a.m. on the morrow the 21st Division (less artillery) would be concentrated in the area Marquaix—Cartigny[2] ready to counter-attack or to relieve the 55th Division; at the same hour the 1st Cavalry Division would be assembled in the Longavesnes—Villers Faucon—Roisel area; at noon the 3rd Cavalry Division, dismounted, would be at Bernes. Later Major-General Vaughan, M.G.G.S. Third Army, informed Lieut.-General Snow that attacks were to be expected south of the 55th Division front[3] and so, as a precaution, the French would put two divisions in the Athies area behind the right of the VII. Corps; and at 11.50 p.m. came a Third Army message to the effect that the 61st Division would be on the line Metz—Fins—Heudicourt next morning at 7 a.m. ready to act under the IV., the III., or the VII. Corps as the situation might demand.

The 55th Division had no reason to reproach itself. Overwhelmed by numbers[4] and by a vastly superior artillery

---

[1] Actually the leading brigade arrived at Roisel (2 miles S. of Villers Faucon) at 10 p.m.

[2] Marquaix, 3½ miles S.W. of Villers Faucon; Cartigny, 6 miles S.W. of Villers Faucon.

[3] German maps had been captured showing the objectives of the tentative offensive near St. Quentin. See page 175.

[4] The six battalions of the 166th and 165th Bdes. on the front of attack had to meet the onset of the *183rd Div.* (*440th Res. Regt.* and *418th Regt.* with the *184th Regt.* following the latter); the *25th Regt.* of the *208th Div.*; and part of the *145th Regt.* (*34th Div.*); also detachments of the *3rd Jäger*, Storm Battalion of the *Second Army*, which had been reinforced from the Storm Battalion of the *Fourth Army*.

Digitized by Google

the troops had shown their quality by standing fast amid their broken defences and resisting as long as resistance was possible. They had gained time for the division to establish a line in rear which was done with practically no assistance, the corps having little reinforcement to provide. It is true that, for the most part, the enemy attained his limited objectives upon the corps front ; but there is no doubt that, if the defence had collapsed, he would have exploited his opportunity and rendered much more difficult, perhaps impossible, the British effort to stem his drive across the base of the salient towards Metz and Havrincourt Wood.

The Right Flank of the III. Corps
Loss and Recapture of Gouzeaucourt : Loss of Gonnelieu

When the Germans overwhelmed the devoted company of the 1/5th S. Lancashire astride the Banteux ravine the way was opened for them to drive deep into the flank and rear of the III. Corps, almost without engaging the troops defending its front.

Br.-General B. Vincent, commanding the 35th Brigade (right brigade of the 12th Division) had his headquarters at a dug-out near the cemetery a little to the north-west of Villers Guislain. As all signal wires had been cut by the bombardment the first intimation he received of the progress of the Germans was that they had entered Villers Guislain and were almost upon him. There was nothing for it but a hasty retirement. Soon after 8 a.m. Br.-General Vincent, with his headquarters personnel, some of the 69th Field Company R.E., and a gun of the 235th Machine-Gun Company, which had withdrawn from the village, were holding a rise 200 yards farther to the west. The machine-gun did great execution until all its detachment were hit, by which time the hostile barrage and the fire of low-flying aeroplanes had caused such heavy loss that the General led the few survivors back to Gauche Wood. Here at least was cover from air attack. Groups of gunners and men from working parties could be seen making their way back towards Chapel Crossing where the road from Villers Guislain to Heudicourt crosses the railway ; so, with the help of a few other officers, Br.-General Vincent rallied about a hundred of the stragglers and formed them into four platoons. Cut off from his own brigade, of whose fortunes

Digitized by Google

he knew nothing, he withdrew with his small array from Gauche Wood, now being heavily shelled, and eventually occupied a position along the railway embankment which offered some protection from air attack. By carefully controlled fire—the general found that the old-fashioned volley answered best with his inexperienced riflemen—all attempts of the enemy to debouch from the southern side of Gauche Wood were prevented. It was not until ammunition ran out that Vincent's Force withdrew to a position on Revelon Ridge, over half a mile in rear. This was done by platoons in succession from the left, the haphazard collection of gunners, sappers, signallers, runners and clerks behaving with admirable steadiness, though suffering many casualties from the fire of the advancing Germans.

Revelon Ridge was reached about 10.15 a.m. Soon afterwards arrived the leading platoon of the 11/Middlesex (36th Brigade, 12th Division) which had moved up from Heudicourt[1]; and when the remainder of the battalion appeared the line was extended to the left. The 6/Queen's (37th Brigade, 12th Division), also from Heudicourt, had come up on the other flank to establish itself astride Chapel Hill with its right at Vaucelette Farm, in touch with the troops of the 55th Division. These two battalions now formed the backbone of Br.-General Vincent's command. A further reinforcement consisted of a company of the 5/Northamptonshire (pioneer battalion of the 12th Division) which had managed to make its way back from the old British trenches south of Gonnelieu[2], and three guns of the 235th Machine-Gun Company, only withdrawn from action at Villers Guislain when all their ammunition was expended.

In the meantime Gouzeaucourt had fallen to the enemy. Situated mainly in a hollow on the Péronne—Cambrai road the village had no prepared defences; but it in were five batteries of heavy howitzers,[3] the headquarters and one company of the 11/Durham L.I. (pioneers of the 20th Division) and the transport of the 18th Brigade (6th Division). Although the howitzers had been firing upon the Banteux and Honnecourt bridges and approaches since 7.15 a.m.

[1] See page 181.

[2] As will presently be related, the Germans were already in possession of Gonnelieu.

[3] 13th, 33rd, 57th, 100th and 431st Siege Batteries: four 6-inch, eight 8-inch, four 9.2-inch and two 12-inch howitzers.

Digitized by Google

no one was aware that the Germans had broken the British front until a stream of gunners, infantrymen, labour corps personnel, transport details and others, with limbers, carts and wagons, were seen retreating towards the village. Men, horses and vehicles were in considerable confusion, but there was little sign of panic and, apart from the behaviour of some individuals, less excitement than might have been expected.

About 8.45 a.m. the headquarters of the 29th Division at Quentin mill, on the western slope of Quentin Ridge, came under artillery and machine-gun fire, compelling Major-General de Lisle to depart in haste. His C.R.A., Br.-General E. H. Stevenson, was wounded and had to be left. The divisional pioneer battalion was near by, but had turned out to work without its weapons; but Major-General de Lisle encountered the 470th Field Company R.E. which was about to enter Gouzeaucourt by the pavé road from Fins[1] and ordered its commander to organize the defence of the village. It was too late for that. The Germans, descending in waves from Quentin Ridge,[2] were already entering the houses. The only resistance came from parties of gunners, traffic control men of the III. Corps cyclist battalion, transport men, details of the 29th Division headquarters, a few pioneers and sappers, and some American engineers.[3] In addition to the siege batteries, a fully loaded supply train, which had arrived in the station not many hours before, fell into German hands.

Meanwhile Lieut.-Colonel G. Hayes, commanding the 11/D.L.I. had withdrawn his men to a rise south-west of Gouzeaucourt where he was joined by the bulk of the 470th Field Company R.E. The situation of the little force seemed precarious. Germans continued to pour into Gouzeaucourt and had reached the railway farther south;[4]

[1] The company came from Equancourt, a mile beyond Fins, where it had been working, and was marching up to join its division, the 59th, on the Bourlon front.

[2] At the southern side of the ridge they captured a 60-pdr. gun of the 1/2nd Lancs. Heavy Bty. which could not be withdrawn in time. The battery had continued in action until the last possible moment.

[3] A detachment of the 11th Engineer (Railway) Regt. U.S.A. was employed on railway construction at Gouzeaucourt. Later in the day it was assembled at Fins, where it dug reserve trenches. Casualties amounted to one officer and 27 other ranks of whom some were captured.

[4] Men of the *145th Regt.* (*34th Div.*) who were captured next day said that they had reached the railway between Gauche Wood and Gouzeaucourt without meeting any opposition whatever.

Digitized by Google

machine-gun fire was coming from the east and the south-east where Vincent's Force could be seen retiring towards Revelon Ridge. Very wisely a withdrawal was made to an old British trench astride the main road about a thousand yards west of Gouzeaucourt; and here the transport contingents of the 1/W. Yorkshire, 11/Essex, and 2/Durham L.I.,[1] all well organized, enabled the left flank to be extended beyond the Gouzeaucourt—Metz road. The enemy showed little sign of advancing in force, and the patrols he sent forward were checked by the rather indifferent musketry of the British whose line, held by only a few hundred hastily assembled men, remained for over two hours unsupported on either flank. It seemed that a priceless opportunity was lost by the Germans.[2]

The completeness of the surprise, achieved if not fully utilized, may be judged by the time taken by the Third Army and the III. Corps to hurry reinforcements to this vital point where the thrust across the communications of the corps extended half-way to Metz, named as the German objective; also by the absence of co-ordination in the counter-attacks which were launched during the afternoon and at night.

The 2nd Cavalry Division (Major-General W. H. Greenly), at Fins, was still awaiting the return of one of its dismounted battalions from the Bourlon front[3] when it came under the command of the corps at 10.15 a.m. Ordered to secure Revelon Ridge the 5th Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General C. L. K. Campbell) moved off soon after 11 a.m. As regards the Guards Division, the Third Army, at the request of the VII. Corps, had ordered one brigade to Heudicourt and then, just before 11 a.m., placed the division under the III. Corps which obviously had sore need of it. Eventually, owing to the issue of conflicting orders caused by ignorance

[1] The quartermasters of these battalions of the 18th Bde. rose nobly to the occasion. For the most part they got their vehicles packed and sent away in orderly fashion, retaining as many men as possible to join the fight. Capt. J. P. L. Shea, quartermaster of the 2/D.L.I., was mortally wounded, as was Captain W. Paul, adjutant of the 1/West Yorkshire who played a leading part in organizing the position.

[2] Some disorganization had been caused by the very rapidity of the advance, whilst losses, especially in officers, had been heavy: the *34th Div.* reported that it had become "leaderless". Shortage of ammunition is also mentioned; but see Note at end of Chapter XIII.

[3] The other two brigades were bathing and cleaning up whilst the Germans were advancing upon Gouzeaucourt.

Digitized by Google

of the situation, the 1st Guards Brigade at Metz advanced alone towards Gouzeaucourt about noon, the other brigades never coming into action at all.[1]

It was nearly 10 a.m. when the battalions of the II. Tank Brigade at Fins received their warning order[2]: one battalion to move direct on Gouzeaucourt and one to attack the village from the direction of Heudicourt. The speed with which the machines were got into fighting trim and three composite battalions formed is worthy of all praise. At 12.40 p.m. 22 tanks of B Battalion moved out towards Gouzeaucourt and were quickly followed by 14 of A Battalion making for Revelon Ridge, Br.-General Vincent having been informed of their coming. The I. Tank Brigade at Havrincourt Wood was not able to do so much; but, solely on the initiative of the senior officer present, 10 tanks of E Battalion left at 1 p.m. to attack Gouzeaucourt from the west whilst 17 of D Battalion moved direct upon the village. Neither of these contingents arrived in time to intervene.

The first reinforcement to reach the thin British line facing Gouzeaucourt was the 20th Hussars at the head of the 5th Cavalry Brigade. Coming under fire as it topped the crest of the high ground south of the pavé road the regiment could make little progress whilst mounted, so left its horses and advanced about noon to extend the line to the right. Here touch was obtained with the 11/Middlesex which formed the left of Vincent's Force. A dismounted squadron of the Royal Scots Greys came up in support.

Br.-General C. R. Champion de Crespigny, commanding the 1st Guards Brigade, had ridden forward from Metz with his battalion commanders in advance of his troops. On reaching Gouzeaucourt Wood he learned that the Germans were in the village and decided to attack at once, although he had no artillery support.

On their forward march the Guards battalions had to pass through groups of retreating men and vehicles making their

[1] The 2nd Guards Bde. moved from Bertincourt (4 miles W.N.W. of Metz) to Neuville (2½ miles W. of Metz) and thence to Gouzeaucourt Wood; the 3rd Guards Bde. from Trescault eventually came up on the left of the 1st Guards Bde. after the latter had retaken Gouzeaucourt village. See page 192.

[2] At 10.5 a.m. the III. Corps had appealed to the Army for any tanks which were available.

Digitized by Google

way towards Metz ; but by 12.30 p.m. the 2nd and 3/Coldstream and 1/Irish Guards were drawn up in artillery formation behind the crest of the high ground west of Gouzeaucourt, the Coldstream battalions south, the Irish Guards north of the Metz—Gouzeaucourt road. The 2/Grenadier Guards was kept in reserve. The day had brightened and the advance over the downland of the three battalions moving in perfect order was a heartening sight. When they came into view of the enemy, machine-gun fire caught them, whilst guns and howitzers—including captured British guns —opened fire from behind Quentin Ridge. But, assisted by the fire of the brigade machine-guns which were handled boldly and well, nothing could stop the practised deployment of the Guards into line and their rapid advance which passed through the sappers and pioneers and carried the 20th Hussars forward with it. The fight for Gouzeaucourt was brief. A number of Germans were shot or bayoneted and about a hundred taken ; the remainder retreated quickly, so that by 1.30 p.m. the Guards had reached a line on the eastern edge of the village, the abandoned siege batteries with their dumps of ammunition being recovered almost intact. Gunners of the 100th Siege Battery who had followed in the wake of the Guards were able to get their four 6-inch howitzers in action again with little trouble or delay. The enemy, too, had had no time to remove the contents of the supply train which proved most welcome to the Guards who had eaten nothing that morning[1].

It was not possible, however, without fresh forces, to press the attack farther[2]. The enemy thus remained in possession of Quentin Ridge and still held the railway in front of Gauche Wood.

Although a tank attack on Gouzeaucourt by way of Chapel Crossing was postponed from 2.30 p.m. to 3.15 p.m. in order that the 6/Queen's of Vincent's Force might participate, four tanks of A Battalion eventually moved off without infantry support. They skirted the western edge of Gauche Wood under heavy fire and arrived at Gouzeaucourt to find

[1] The 1st Guards Bde. fed from the supply train for 48 hours.

[2] The Guards Division had been ordered verbally "after capturing "Gouzeaucourt to seize Quentin Ridge from Gauche Wood to Gonnelieu, "both inclusive". This was repeated in a III. Corps telegram, timed 3.35 p.m., which also contained the Cavalry Corps attack order. See page 183.

Digitized by Google

the Guards in possession. The remainder of the tanks of A Battalion, with those of B Battalion, had advanced straight upon the village to make the same discovery; so, after leaving the Guards a number of Lewis guns and a supply of ammunition, the two battalions rallied under cover in rear of Gouzeaucourt[1]. H Battalion had come up to a support position nearby, and did not enter the fight. Five tanks had been lost by direct hits during these operations and several developed mechanical troubles.

In the meantime the 5th Cavalry Division had advanced northward to the attack, the Ambala Brigade (Br.-General C. H. Rankin), which began to pass west of Chapel Hill about 2.30 p.m., leading the way at a trot. A squadron of the 8th Hussars, which galloped for Gauche Wood from the south-west, came into collision with a squadron of the 12th Lancers (5th Cavalry Brigade) which was doing likewise from the west, but mounted effort failed under artillery and heavy machine-gun fire. The Lancers were withdrawn; the Hussars, reinforced by the 9th Hodson's Horse, tried a dismounted attack which fared little better. Eventually the line secured by the Ambala Brigade lay along a sunken road west of the railway,[2] with Hodson's Horse on the left in touch with the 20th Hussars of the 5th Cavalry Brigade. The Secunderabad Brigade had moved on the left flank of the Ambala Brigade in the northward advance and, after finding Gouzeaucourt in the hands of the Guards, concentrated in a support position south of the Fins—Gouzeaucourt road. Major-General Macandrew had used the Canadian Cavalry Brigade on his right flank, with orders to advance on Villers Guislain if opportunity offered. When the light began to fail Strathcona's Horse were in a position facing Chapel Crossing, in touch on the left with the 8th Hussars (Ambala Brigade), and the line was extended astride the railway to a point east of Vaucelette Farm by the Royal Canadian Dragoons.

Thus the front from the farm to the north-eastern edge of Gouzeaucourt was now held by the Canadian and Ambala Brigades (5th Cavalry Division) the 20th Hussars (2nd

[1] The Germans (G.O.A. xiii.) blame the British tanks for "the reverse " at Gouzeaucourt ". A contributory cause is said to have been the capture of food supplies which diverted the badly-fed German troops from their duty.

[2] The 8th Hussars lost 2 officers (including a squadron commander killed), 36 other ranks and 73 horses. Hodson's Horse had two squadron commanders killed, and lost 50 other ranks and 70 horses.

Digitized by Google

Cavalry Division) and the 1st Guards Brigade. After darkness fell the 8th Hussars was relieved by the 18th Lancers (also of the Ambala Brigade). Between the 20th Hussars and the 2/Coldstream Guards were now three companies of the 11/Middlesex forming the left of Vincent's Force which, on Revelon Ridge, remained as support behind the cavalry. Lewis gun detachments from the tanks had strengthened the position which also received such reinforcements as the III. Corps could provide[1]. The sappers and pioneers converted Revelon Farm into a defended locality. On the other flank, in reserve to the 1st Guards Brigade, was the 2nd Guards Brigade in Gouzeaucourt Wood. The 3rd Guards Brigade had moved forward on the northern side of the village, where also the offensive action of reinforcements had brought the German advance to a halt.

Gonnelieu had, however, been lost. Situated on Quentin Ridge a mile east of Gouzeaucourt, the village like Villers Guislain lay open to attack from the Banteux ravine. Its houses provided accommodation for the 70th Field Company R.E. and the 5/Northamptonshire (pioneer battalion of the 12th Division). The headquarters of the 36th Brigade (Br.-General C. S. Owen) were on the northern outskirts; and on the north-western side were the positions of the 377th and 379th Batteries (169th Army Brigade, R.F.A.), C/63 Battery (12th Division artillery), the 25th Heavy Battery (four 60-pdrs.), and the 354th Siege Battery (four 6-inch howitzers).

Gonnelieu was shelled by 5·9-inch howitzers from 6.45 a.m. onward and soon all communications were severed. No S.O.S. signal was seen and the approach of the German infantry about 9 a.m. came as a surprise[2]. South-east of the village, the 7/Suffolk (reserve battalion of the 35th Brigade) in the old British front line had been shelled with gas and then attacked from right flank and rear; few men escaped and the battalion commander, Major G. H. Henty, and most of his officers were killed. To the south, on the slope of the Banteux ravine, five reserve guns of the 35th Machine-Gun Company were overwhelmed. A telephone message from

[1] 239th Army Troops Coy. R.E., 1/2nd Monmouthshire (pioneer battalion of the 29th Div.), the corps cyclist battalion, and other details.

[2] The F.O.O. of the 25th Heavy Battery had failed to reach his O.P. owing to the bombardment.

Digitized by Google

the 12th Division had ordered Br.-General Owen to organize the defence of the village but there was no time to do so. The 70th Field Company R.E. lined Gin Avenue, a communication trench running along the northern face; the pioneers, pressed back westward, could rally only two companies in Green Switch, a continuation of Gin Avenue. The howitzers and 60-pdrs. had to be abandoned as they stood[1]: a certain number of men of the 354th Siege Battery, being armed, joined the pioneers, but the detachments of the 60-pdrs. were caught without their rifles whilst sheltering from the bombardment

As all communications had been broken, 36th Brigade headquarters moved back, and by noon were established at Villers Plouich where the headquarters of the 37th Brigade later arrived.

Faced with so little opposition, it is remarkable that, after the occupation of Gonnelieu, the German advance should have stopped[2]. That it did so is largely to the credit of the British field batteries near at hand. The 377th and 379th Batteries, one south and one north of Gin Avenue, played havoc at short range with parties of Germans seen among the houses; and, although the detachments suffered heavy loss, they did not seek cover until they had expended all their ammunition and had made desperate efforts to withdraw their guns by hand. C/63, a little further to the west, displayed a like spirit, whilst A/63 and B/63, in action a thousand yards away to the north, also took their toll of the enemy.

Two guns of C/63 were run out of their pits and swung to cover the front and both flanks. They were kept in action even when only Lieut. S. T. D. Wallace and five men of the battery were left. Under heavy fire these survivors served each gun alternately, running from one to the other, until, about 10.30 a.m. when the fight had lasted two hours, the German infantry closed in. But British infantry were now arriving from the north and the task of the battery was done: Lieut. Wallace and his men stripped the guns

[1] One of the howitzers was out of action. Afterwards, the other three were deliberately disabled by fire from a British field battery in rear, each howitzer receiving a direct hit.

[2] Gonnelieu lay in the path of the *67th Regt.* reinforced by the *30th Regt.* (*both 34th Div.*) forming the right of the Busigny Group. Next on the right was the *109th Grenadiers* (*28th Div.*) of the Caudry Group. The inner flanks of the two divisions formed the centre of the German main thrust directed on Metz.

Digitized by Google

of sights and breech-blocks and then withdrew, taking their wounded with them[1].

The reinforcements which had appeared so opportunely belonged to the 60th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel C. J. Troyte-Bullock) which had been in reserve at Villers Plouich. At 9 a m. Major-General W. Douglas Smith, commanding the 20th Division, who was not yet aware that the German attack involved his own front, ordered his reserve brigade to advance to the line Quentin Ridge—Gonnelieu—la Vacquerie. Half an hour later, when news of a break-in on the 20th Division front was received, this order was cancelled, two battalions which were to move on Quentin Ridge now being required to man the old Hindenburg front system. For a time, the threat to Villers Plouich was regarded as serious. Some stragglers had reached the village which came under a certain amount of small-arms fire, and the detachments serving the howitzers of three siege batteries, the 55th, 129th and 166th, were withdrawn from Villers Plouich at 10.45 a.m.

As might have been expected, the counter-order of the 20th Division led to confusion and delay. The 6/K Shropshire L.I., being ready first, had started first, moving southward from Villers Plouich, and was soon in contact with the enemy who fell back. The battalion, unsupported on either flank, reached a position astride the railway north-east of Gouzeaucourt and took possession of the quarry nearby. Next on the left the 6/Oxford & Bucks L.I. had been halted on receipt of the fresh orders, but at 2 p.m. was launched against Quentin Ridge from the north, some of the Shropshire joining in. After crossing the main Péronne—Cambrai road this advance came to an end, under heavy fire, on the lower slopes of the ridge, but linked up on the left with the 12/Rifle Brigade which had reached Gin Avenue on the north side of Gonnelieu before 11 a.m. Meanwhile the remaining battalion of the 60th Brigade, the 12/K.R.R.C., had occupied a position about la Vacquerie, rallying about one hundred and fifty stragglers of the 12th Division who assisted to cover the very wide front which the brigade had established. The left was in touch with troops of the 35th Brigade (12th Division). On the right flank, at Gouzeaucourt, the Shropshire had linked up with the Irish Guards

[1] Lieut. Wallace was awarded the V.C., the other five survivors receiving the D.C.M.

Digitized by Google

of the 1st Guards Brigade. In rear, a company of the 11/D.L.I. (pioneer battalion of the 20th Division) had taken up a position south-west of Villers Plouich.

The counter-attacks had been assisted by the action of ten aeroplanes, belonging to No. 68 Squadron, which attacked German infantry with bomb and machine gun; but on this day the R.F.C. was chiefly concerned with the Bourlon—Moeuvres front.

During the afternoon other troops from the north arrived near Gouzeaucourt. Shortly before 10 a.m. the III. Corps ordered the 6th Division, which seemed to be outside the area of attack, to send its reserve brigade, the 16th (Br.-General H. A. Walker), to Dead Man's Corner a cross-roads east of Gouzeaucourt Wood. The battalions, which had been at work all night, began to approach their destination, three to four miles distant from their quarters near Ribécourt, about noon, Br.-General H. A. Walker and his brigade-major having gone on in advance. Knowing nothing of the situation, the 6th Division[1] expected a German advance from Gouzeaucourt upon Beaucamp: the 16th Brigade was therefore ordered to take up a line covering Beaucamp and to await the arrival of tanks before attacking Gouzeaucourt. A little later, however, patrols discovered that the Guards were in Gouzeaucourt. A few tanks of the I. Brigade[2] having come up, an advance south-eastward began about 3.30 p.m. at the same moment as the 3rd Guards Brigade moved forward eastward to cover the left of the 1st Guards Brigade. Naturally there was some confusion and inter-mingling of units and a halt to reorganize became imperative. The tanks were withdrawn. In the gathering dusk a line was formed along the Villers Plouich—Gouzeaucourt road well in rear of the 60th Brigade. The 4/Grenadier Guards (3rd Guards Brigade), however, got into touch with the Shropshire L.I. (right battalion of the 60th Brigade) near the quarry.

The commanders of both the 60th and the 16th Brigades had corps orders to make another effort during the night; but, curiously enough, neither knew of the other's intentions, nor were their respective divisional headquarters better informed.

[1] 6th Div. H.Q. was out of touch with the III. Corps by telephone from about 9.30 a.m. until 12.30 p.m.

[2] See page 189.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*)

THE GERMAN COUNTER-STROKE, 30th NOVEMBER (*continued*)

III. CORPS :

LOSS OF THE BONAVIS RIDGE ; THE FIGHT AT LES RUES VERTES : THE COUNTER-ATTACK FROM MARCOING

(Sketch 14)

The attack of the Caudry Group, north of the Banteux ravine, followed an hour later than that of the Busigny Group to the south. As a consequence, at III. Corps headquarters and at the headquarters of its divisions the impression at first prevailed that only the 55th Division (VII. Corps) was likely to be involved. When at 8 a.m., the German assault was launched against the III. Corps front many of the heavy batteries and some of the field batteries, being already over-run or fighting for their own existence at short range, could do little to help the infantry defence[1].

In the 35th Brigade, forming the right of the 12th Division (Major-General A. B. Scott) and of the corps, Br.-General Vincent had taken measures, as we have seen, to guard against surprise. The 5/R. Berkshire, holding the spur above the Banteux ravine as far as Quarry Post, was first engaged on its left, German bombers attacking the post under cover of a trench-mortar barrage. Having forced an entry they pressed the Berkshire back south-westward along the trenches, but were in turn obliged to give ground in the face of a determined counter-attack. For a time the fight swayed to and fro, but parties of the enemy[2] had filtered through behind the front companies ; and when, at 10.30 a.m., it became known that Gonnelieu was lost the Berkshire retired upon the 9/Essex which occupied a support

[1] Following the withdrawal of two brigades R.F.A. (see page 169) a reorganization of the four brigades covering the 12th Div. was carried out on the afternoon of the 29th Nov., and, in the case of three batteries, should have been completed by fresh registration on the morning of the 30th.

[1] Belonging to the *109th Grenadiers*, which formed the left of the *28th Div.*, that is to say the left of the Caudry Group.

Digitized by Google

position on Gonnelieu Ridge. Early in the afternoon, both battalions, under strong German pressure and much harassed by low-flying aeroplanes, continued the withdrawal across the main Cambrai road to la Vacquerie. Here, by order of Br.-General C. S. Owen commanding the 36th Brigade, they came under the command of the 60th Brigade whose troops had already arrived to ensure the defence of the village[1].

Near the barricade, where the road from Gonnelieu to la Vacquerie crosses the main road, the six 6-inch howitzers of the 110th Siege Battery had suffered from the German barrage; but two howitzers had come into action and continued to fire until the Germans reached the crest of Gonnelieu Ridge. The gunners then removed dial sights and breech blocks, and, armed with rifles, joined the 60th Brigade at la Vacquerie. Five 6-inch howitzers of the 108th Siege Battery had to be left in their position at Sonnet Farm[2]. On the south-western edge of la Vacquerie the 254th Siege Battery, although under heavy fire, kept its 6-inch howitzers in action until 2.15 p.m. when sights and breech blocks were buried and the detachments withdrew to Metz. Four 60-pdrs. of the 144th Heavy Battery nearby were abandoned also.

The fate of the 7/Suffolk, in reserve south-east of Gonnelieu, has already been related.[3] The 7/Norfolk, in the Hindenburg support system on the left of the Berkshire, was attacked about 8 a.m. from the direction of Quarry Post, and also from the front by Germans advancing straight up the spur from Banteux. Although the rifles and Lewis guns of the battalion and the weapons of the 35th Machine-Gun Company[4] did great execution, the enemy pressed forward regardless of loss and in such numbers that the Norfolk were overwhelmed. Lieut.-Colonel H. L. F. A. Gielgud, commanding the battalion, was among the wounded and missing; one officer with a small party of survivors joined the 9/Royal Fusiliers (36th Brigade) in Pelican Trench on the left.

A, B and C Batteries of the LXII. Brigade R.F.A., in action south-west of la Vacquerie, ran their guns into the open to

[1] See page 194.

[2] " Grenadier Regt. No. 110 " claims the capture of this battery.

[3] See page 192.

[4] The company had seven guns in forward positions on the brigade front, four in support and five in reserve. Very few of the forward guns were saved, but there is evidence that they were kept in action as long as possible.

Digitized by Google

shell the Germans on Gonnelieu Ridge. A Battery was withdrawn soon after midday; B Battery remained in action till 2 p.m., using limber ammunition supply during the last half-hour with the drivers mounted; and C Battery withdrew after 3 p.m. under machine-gun fire which inflicted surprisingly few casualties on the teams.

The 36th Brigade (Br.-General C. S. Owen) had one company of the 9/Royal Fusiliers in the south-western portion of Pelican Trench which was held until the Germans broke through the Norfolk on the right. A counter-attack relieved the pressure and enabled a withdrawal to be made to the Hindenburg front system, south of the main Cambrai road, where blocks were established in the trenches and held throughout the day. In this position touch was obtained with the troops of the 60th Brigade and the remnants of the 35th Brigade in front of la Vacquerie. One company of the 9/Royal Fusiliers did not fare so well; it was occupying three strongpoints covering Bleak House, on the main road, and held out, although surrounded, until the evening when the survivors were obliged to surrender.

The 8/Royal Fusiliers, the other front battalion of the 36th Brigade, occupied the north-eastern portion of Pelican Trench. The two forward companies were crushed by heavy attacks from the front and the right flank, whilst a third company, coming forward over the Cambrai road to reinforce, was caught by the concentrated fire of light machine-guns. The commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel N. B. Elliott-Cooper, called upon his headquarters personnel and the remaining company and led a counter-attack which drove the Germans back over the crest of the Bonavis ridge; but hostile machine-gun fire then checked this effort and the colonel fell, severely wounded, whilst well in advance of his men. He was captured, after ordering a withdrawal[1]. This counter-attack enabled the remnants of the battalion to rally in the reserve line south-east of la Vacquerie where, strengthened by part of the reserve battalion, the 7/R. Sussex[2], and eleven guns of the 36th Machine-Gun Company, a position was established in a communication trench facing east. On the

[1] Lieut.-Colonel Elliott-Cooper received the V.C. for his gallant leadership. He died a prisoner of war in Germany, on 11th Feb. 1918.

[2] The fourth battalion of the brigade, 11/Middlesex, was with Vincent's Force. See page 186.

Digitized by Google

right, touch was established with the 9/Royal Fusiliers in the Hindenburg support system.

The 37th Brigade (Br.-General A. B. Incledon-Webber), forming the left of the 12th Division, had the 7/E. Surrey in the defences round Bonavis Farm at the junction of the two main roads. Here the German advance at first threatened to envelope the position from the south and west: indeed brigade headquarters, situated 700 yards north of Bleak House, had to beat off a party of the enemy before 8.30 a.m. But soon the Germans were working round both flanks and also pressing a frontal attack. On the left they reached Pam Pam Farm. The East Surrey, who had suffered severely from the bombardment, fell back as best they could along the Hindenburg support system where they were reinforced by a company of the 6/Buffs, from brigade reserve. A counter-attack then drove the Germans back over the main road south-west of Bonavis, and a communication trench which ran beside the road was occupied. This position was maintained for nearly three hours, but when both British and German guns began to shell the trench a withdrawal had to be made. Heavy machine-gun fire harassed the movement and the German infantry closed in, reoccupying Pam Pam Farm. Lieut.-Colonel R. H.Baldwin, commanding the East Surrey, was captured about 1.30 p.m., most of his party, which was cut off, being killed or wounded.

This disaster to the East Surrey was due, in some degree, to the German penetration of Lateau Wood where the 6/R. West Kent, the left of the 37th Brigade and of the 12th Division, had struggled valiantly against overwhelming odds. The first attack developed from the north-east, where the outpost line of the 20th Division had been pierced, and soon the Germans were in possession of le Quennet Farm. Groups of the West Kent, whose fighting strength was very low, maintained the struggle until noon, and only a handful got away. Their commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel W. R. A. Dawson, was wounded early in the action.[1]

The three remaining companies of the 6/Buffs, in the Hindenburg support system north-west of Pam Pam Farm, were well placed to check by their fire the advance of the

[1] The opponents of the West Kent were the *190th Res.* forming the left of the *220th Div.* attack.

Digitized by Google

Germans down the slopes of the Bonavis ridge. In this position were gradually collected the remnants of the other two battalions—some sixty of the East Surrey and a few of the West Kent—with a number of spare gunners and batmen armed with rifles, and eight guns of the 37th Machine-Gun Company,[1] the whole under the command of Lieut.-Colonel A. S. Smeltzer of the Buffs. The little force amounting to a few hundred men, all that was left of the 37th Brigade,[2] was able to inflict heavy loss upon the Germans who made many attempts to close ; and the defence owed much to the support of the 179th Army Brigade R.F.A. located in and about the Hindenburg front system east of la Vacquerie. Guns were run into the open and fired over open sights, and although the detachments suffered many casualties from German machine-gun fire the batteries continued in action.

Before noon German progress to the north, in the area of the 20th Division, began to threaten the security of the left flank and Lieut.-Colonel Smeltzer thereupon withdrew his force to a communication trench between the Hindenburg support and Hindenburg front systems, only about one hundred yards in front of the foremost battery positions. The 87th Field Company R.E. manned supporting points east of la Vacquerie, and, on the right, touch was obtained with what survived of the 36th Brigade. The line was held against repeated attacks which diminished as the afternoon wore on. At nightfall the gun detachments of the 179th Army Brigade, having expended all their ammunition, removed breech-blocks and dial sights from the guns and were withdrawn to Villers Plouich. This measure proved to be an unfortunate one. The intention was to take the guns out during the night, and the teams, brought forward from distant wagon-lines through darkness and considerable confusion, succeeded in reaching the guns only to find the detachments gone. One battery, however, the 463rd, withdrew by hand all its guns, except one which was damaged, and came into action south-west of Beaucamp early next morning.

[1] Three guns of the 37th M.G. Coy. in forward positions were smashed by the bombardment ; the detachment of another gun were all killed ; one gun was brought back from Lateau Wood ; one gun was reported missing. Eight guns of the 235th M.G. Coy. in forward positions on the brigade front were lost ; of the detachments only three men came back.

[2] The fourth battalion, the 6/Queen's, was with Vincent's Force.

Digitized by Google

The 12th Division had not been able to prevent the success of the German thrust at its rear, past its right flank; neither could it do much to minimize the effect of this penetration, although Vincent's Force had certainly played a useful, perhaps a vital, part in slowing up the German advance south of the Banteux ravine. The troops of the division were tired and, in some cases, were taken by surprise when the frontal attack developed: subjected to a short but destructive bombardment and overwhelmed by superior numbers, they had been driven from their front defences with heavy loss in men and guns. Yet all arms had offered so stout a resistance that they had brought to a halt one of the two German divisions which was striving to carry the enemy's main attack through to Metz.[1]

On the left of the 12th Division the 20th Division (Major-General W. Douglas Smith), holding the south-eastern shoulder of the salient, had, perhaps, the most unfortunate experience of the day. The northern and north-eastern slopes of the Bonavis ridge were not easy to defend; they were overlooked from high ground beyond Crèvecoeur and east of Vaucelles whilst, as already noticed, the canal crossings were not in view even from the outpost line of the division. Yet an enemy break-in at any point south of les Rues Vertes would at once take in rear the positions of the 29th Division beyond the St. Quentin canal. The main line of resistance, consisting of a fire trench and support trench in course of completion, ran northward from the junction with the 12th Division near Lateau Wood down the slope to the marshy border of the canal, a distance of nearly two miles. From either flank an outpost line—for the most part a series of unconnected slit trenches as yet inadequately wired—was traced forward to the cemetery which lay a mile in front of the main line and had been organized for all-round defence. The digging of communication trenches had not yet been taken in hand.

North of Lateau Wood the mist, which appears to have been thicker than it was elsewhere, added considerably to

[1] The *40th Fusiliers*, which took le Pavé, and the *110th Grenadiers*, which reached Sonnet Farm, both suffered heavy loss in officers, and to the Fusiliers the extent of the advance was frankly disappointing ("Fus. Regt. "No. 40" and "Gren. Regt. No. 110"). The three regiments of the *28th Div.* (the *109th Grenadiers* were on the left of the *110th*) made little attempt to advance beyond the main Cambrai road. All accounts emphasise the obstinate resistance of the British.

Digitized by Google

the difficulties of the defence. On this part of the front, too, the enemy's low-flying air attacks were particularly effective, many of the British machine-guns being on anti-aircraft mountings when called upon to deal with the German infantry.

In the right sector, held by the 59th Brigade[1], the 10/K.R.R.C. immediately north of Lateau Wood had one company in the outpost line. This company saw nothing of the attack until the Germans appeared on its right rear. The enemy then came on so fast from, it seemed, all directions that the two companies in the main line and the fourth which was farther back in a support position were soon involved in a desperate and hopeless struggle. Four officers and 16 men of the battalion survived at the end of the day. Two sections of the 83rd Field Company R.E. which had become involved in the fighting near le Quennet Farm managed to get back to la Vacquerie.

Of the two outpost companies of the 11/K.R.R.C. next on the left the one holding the cemetery strongpoint was cut off and no more was heard of it. Its orders were to resist to the last. The other, whose withdrawal was permitted, endeavoured to fall back but could not get clear; groups of men became mixed with the advancing Germans so that they masked the fire of the two companies in the main line. Thus the 11/K.R.R.C. shared the fate of its sister battalion, nor did the disasters of the brigade end here. Five hundred yards farther back the 10/Rifle Brigade, in support, was taken by surprise in the mist, being enveloped before the companies could counter-attack or even take up defensive positions. The commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel L. H. W. Troughton was captured at his telephone; those officers and men who managed to fight their way out joined the 7/D.C.L.I., the support battalion of the 61st Brigade, farther to the left.

None of the twelve guns of the 217th Machine-Gun Company which were in position on and close behind the brigade front was saved, and few of the detachments got away. In this sector, too, three guns of the 59th Machine-

[1] Under Br.-Gen. F. J. Duncan, G.O.C. 60th Bde. the relief of whose battalions had just been completed although command had not passed. It is stated that brigade headquarters were at a great disadvantage in not knowing the names of the battalion commanders.

Digitized by Google

Gun Company were destroyed by the German bombardment ; others were disabled before being abandoned.

In reserve the 11/Rifle Brigade occupied in front of the Hindenburg support system a position through which, from 9 a.m. onward, stragglers and gunners from the forward batteries made their way. During the morning the Germans made four attacks upon this line, but all were repulsed by rifle, Lewis gun and artillery fire.

The XCII. Brigade R.F.A. which was covering the 61st Brigade on the left from positions about 700 yards north-west of Lateau Wood had naturally become involved in the misfortunes of the 59th Brigade. Communications were damaged by the German bombardment before 7 a.m. and were finally broken about an hour later. When the S.O.S. was seen on the 12th Division front at about 7.30 a.m. two guns of the nearest battery were run out of their pits and trained on Pam Pam Farm ; but at eight o'clock the S.O.S. was reported from the 20th Division front so the brigade put down the prescribed barrage on the western bank of the canal in front of Crèvecoeur. Three of the four battery positions, however, had been so accurately located by the German artillery that losses were heavy ; C battery had all its guns hit save one, and the ammunition supply of that gun exploded. In spite of the enemy's fire the gunners remained until the infantry had retired through them and the Germans began to close in. Breech-blocks, sights, and the wounded were then brought away, the detachments being directed to the wagon lines near Gouzeaucourt.

The batteries of the XCI. Brigade R.F.A. supporting the 59th Brigade were in action about the Hindenburg front system north-east of la Vacquerie. All day they maintained a heavy fire upon the Germans descending from the Bonavis ridge north of Lateau Wood, and by nightfall each battery had expended nearly 4,000 rounds, mostly at ranges of less than two thousand yards. After darkness fell the guns were withdrawn, to come into action early next morning near Beaucamp.

In la Vacquerie valley about fifteen hundred yards north-east of the XCI. Brigade R.F.A. was the XV. Brigade R.H.A. of the 29th Division. Aroused before 2 a.m. by hostile artillery fire directed on all batteries in and near the valley, the brigade remained alert and expectant of attack. Counter-preparation was opened at 6 a.m. and an hour later at the

Digitized by Google

request of the 86th Brigade (29th Division) the guns concentrated upon the approaches to Mon Plaisir Farm. Soon after 8 a.m. it became evident that a heavy attack was falling upon the 20th Division and about 9 a.m. a number of stragglers retreated through the battery positions. Few, if any, troops now remained between the guns and the Germans, yet the batteries continued in action for another hour and a half, taking heavy toll of the hostile infantry advancing over the Bonavis ridge. Covered by the fire of L Battery, the other detachments eventually withdrew, taking breech-blocks, dial sights and their wounded with them; and when the others were clear the gunners of L Battery followed. Lieut.-Colonel E. R. Burne, commanding the brigade, hoped that a counter-attack would recover his guns, but no troops were available for such a stroke. However, with a party of his gunners he accompanied a platoon of the 11/Rifle Brigade which advanced and held the Germans in check long enough for a wireless set to be recovered and all maps and documents to be destroyed.

Holding the left of the divisional front the 61st Brigade (Br.-General W. E. Banbury) had the 12/King's on the right, two companies being in the outpost zone, one in the main line of resistance, and one in reserve. The 7/Somerset L.I., on the left, put no less than three companies in the outpost position. These outpost companies were not strong enough to resist envelopment; and the Germans once they had penetrated the gaps, found it comparatively easy to overwhelm the remainder of the two battalions. There were few survivors. Major R. B. Charsley, commanding the King's, was missing; Major R. P. Preston Whyte of the Somerset L.I. was severely wounded.[1] The 7/Duke of Cornwall's L.I., in support in la Vacquerie valley, had seen no S.O.S. signal on the brigade front and was ill prepared for the onset of the Germans which gave the battalion no chance to move out and counter-attack. For a time, however, the enemy's advance was held and considerable loss was inflicted upon him; but the commanding officer, Major J. B. Macmillan, was killed whilst leading a party forward and the battalion then gave ground, greatly harassed by low-flying air attacks. It rallied on the

[1] In a number of the battalions of the division the commanding officers were taking a short rest, having been replaced by their seconds-in-command.

Digitized by Google

7/K.O.Y.L.I. in the reserve position immediately east of the Hindenburg support system, where touch was maintained with the remnants of the 59th Brigade on the right and, on the left, with troops of the 29th Division.

The defence was strengthened by two companies of the 11/Durham L.I. (Pioneers) which had been working in the brigade area during the night[1], and the four remaining guns of the 61st Machine-Gun Company. The company had lost twelve guns, emplaced near the main Cambrai road just south of les Rues Vertes ; these had been heard in action until the German advance over-ran them.

The surprise attack, the low fighting strength of battalions, the overstrained condition of the troops, faulty dispositions, and insufficient artillery support all contributed to the failure of the 20th Division to hold its own ; but, considering the natural disadvantages of the position, the resources available did not admit of an adequate defence scheme. It must be remembered, also, that the reserve brigade which might have been used to good effect in counter-attack, had been diverted to another part of the field, so that two brigades faced the onslaught of parts of two German divisions. As a consequence the 20th Division was thrown back to the lower slopes of Welsh Ridge ; but here the fire of the infantry, with that of the batteries and such machine guns as remained in action, turned the Germans northward, away from their proper line of advance[2]. This change of direction however, placed the enemy on the right rear of the 29th Division. The manner in which this threat to the safety of all the British troops beyond the canal was countered by hard fighting and good leadership will now be described.

The front of the 29th Division (Major-General Sir B. de Lisle), held by two brigades, lay beyond the St. Quentin canal, the 86th Brigade (Br.-General G. R. H. Cheape) occupying the trenches covering Masnières. On the right the 16/Middlesex had posts at Mon Plaisir Farm and at the canal bridge to the south of the farm ; the flank of the 1/Lancashire Fusiliers, on the left, rested upon the main Cambrai road. In support, amongst the houses with two

[1] One company had marched back soon after dawn from the cemetery strongpoint ; the other had been employed on roads.

[2] So much is admitted. The *30th Div.*, after its initial success, swung right-handed towards Marcoing and thereby lost touch with the *220th Div.*, the *9th Res. Div.* pushing forward to fill the gap. G.O.A. xiii.

Digitized by Google

companies at the sugar factory on the eastern edge of Masnières, was the 2/Royal Fusiliers, whilst the reserve battalion, the R. Guernsey L.I., was accommodated in the catacombs. Brigade headquarters, also, were in the village. On the near side of the canal les Rues Vertes was ungarrisoned and unorganized for defence; part of it—by an unfortunate settlement of boundaries—lay in the area of the 20th Division. The ground near the canal on the eastern side was marshy, so that the division trusted to a machine-gun defence of the locality, no infantry being near.

Warned by an artillery liaison officer of the destructive and neutralizing fire directed upon the battery positions, Br.-General Cheape had also had his suspicions aroused by the noise of enemy transport and troop movement during the night. He therefore ordered his battalions to be on the alert, and two companies of the reserve battalion in the catacombs to stand to arms. From 7 a.m. onward fairly heavy machine-gun and artillery fire played alternately on the front trenches of the 86th Brigade and on Masnières. Shortly before nine o'clock a frontal attack, preceded by low-flying aeroplanes, developed[1]. This was checked by the fire of rifles and Lewis guns and the guns of the machine-gun company—eight in forward positions and four in support—which found excellent targets. No German got within four hundred yards of the main position, but the Middlesex were obliged to withdraw their posts at Mon Plaisir farm and bridge, and the bombardment of the British trenches continued.

If to the front battalions it appeared that the artillery made but a feeble response to their S.O.S. signals there was good reason for this inadequate support. Three brigades of field artillery covered the divisional front. The XV. Brigade R.H.A. was, as we know, involved in the struggle of the 20th Division; the other two, XVII. Brigade R.F.A. and 232nd Army Brigade—both located in the Couillet Wood valley—assisted the 86th Brigade with the rapid fire of four batteries. These were all that could be devoted to the purpose, for another crisis had arisen. Having broken through the left brigade of the 20th Division south of les Rues Vertes, German infantry in large numbers[2] were streaming forward towards Marcoing and the battery positions.

[1] Made by the left of the *107th Division*.

[2] The *30th Div.*, which was given as its general objective the Flesquières ridge beyond Ribécourt, and, later, the head of the *9th Res. Div.* coming in on its left.

Digitized by Google

Unopposed, the enemy had already entered les Rues Vertes from the south, though not in any force; but the 497th (Kent) Field Company R.E. had been taken by surprise and captured[1]. Captain R. Gee, staff captain of the 86th Brigade, was at rear brigade headquarters near the main canal bridge when Br.-General Cheape telephoned an order to establish a defensive flank at once. A messenger was despatched at the same time to warn the 88th Brigade in reserve in Marcoing.

Present with Captain Gee were twelve signallers and orderlies and Capt. C. E. Loseby, Lancashire Fusiliers. This officer with six men Captain Gee despatched to gain touch with the Middlesex at the lock bridge; he himself, with the rest of the party, proceeded to clear the enemy from the village. In the street leading south-westward to the brewery he checked the advancing Germans, who were clearly surprised, by the fire of a Lewis gun and his few rifles. Thus time was gained to throw up a rough barricade of furniture. Captain Gee then entered the brigade ammunition store where he was pounced upon by two Germans; one he killed with his ironshod stick and then grappled with the other until assistance arrived. Thirty or forty men, reinforcements for the Guernsey L.I., now appeared, followed shortly afterwards by two companies of the battalion which had been sent back across the canal by the brigade commander. Captain Gee had a barricade built in the main street and then worked forward from it with bombers who drove the Germans back to the southern end. Here another barricade was erected and a line linked up with Captain Loseby's position near the canal. Next, the Germans were bombed out of the street leading to Marcoing, and, finally, in similar fashion they were driven back down the street towards the brewery. They then retired from the brewery, taking their sapper prisoners with them.

The houses were now clear of the enemy, and a continuous, if thinly held, line was established from the southern exits of the village to the lock bridge. But the enemy, supported by a machine-gun, was digging in only a hundred yards away to the south-west, far too close to be permitted. Bringing up a Stokes mortar, Captain Gee, with one orderly, worked out

[1] The company, after a hard night's work, was asleep in a tunnel at the brewery on the S.W. edge of the village. The brewery accommodated an advanced dressing station.

Digitized by Google

to a flank and rushed the machine-gun as the mortar fired a wild inaccurate round. The orderly was shot, but the staff captain's revolvers accounted for the machine-gun detachment; and, then, with the assistance of a party of infantry, the machine-gun was turned on the enemy to cover the advance of a bombing party. The Stokes mortar silenced another German machine-gun and this portion of the defence could then be accounted reasonably secure. Shortly afterwards Captain Gee was wounded in the knee.[1]

He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his defence—one might almost say his recapture—of les Rues Vertes. In the words of his brigade commander, " by his heroic conduct, " his energy, his fine leadership and utter neglect of himself, " Captain Gee certainly saved the 86th Brigade ".

Br.-General Cheape now organized an all-round defence of les Rues Vertes, bringing two companies of the Royal Fusiliers back across the canal to hold the south-eastern part of the village; the R. Guernsey L.I. continued the line round to the canal bank on the west. Meanwhile the batteries in the Couillet Wood valley were engaging the Germans, who, regardless of loss, were advancing in great strength across the lower slopes of Welsh Ridge towards Marcoing. A forward battery of the 232nd Brigade R.F.A. was over-run, the detachments, which had suffered heavy casualties, withdrawing at the last moment with their breech-blocks and sights. The guns of the 92nd Battery and of D Battery (both of the XVII. Brigade) were run out of their pits as the attacking waves drew near; two Lewis guns, one of which was acquired from a retreating party of the 20th Division, were used with great effect to supplement the direct fire of the 18-pdrs. and field howitzers. At last, at about 11.30 a.m., the situation was relieved by a counter-attack from Marcoing.

In Marcoing were the 1/K.O.S.B., reserve battalion of the 87th Brigade holding the left sector of the divisional front;[2] and the 88th Brigade (Br.-General H. Nelson) which constituted the divisional reserve. The village had been shelled with gas and high explosive from an early hour and all communications were cut. About 9 a.m. the first alarm

[1] His adventures were not yet over. After his wound had been dressed he remained on duty until the following morning when, on his way back to Marcoing, he swam the canal to avoid capture after being challenged in German.

[2] Shown on Sketch 15.

Digitized by Google

was received, a message from the 86th Brigade in Masnières reaching Br.-General C. H. T. Lucas commanding the 87th Brigade. He ordered the K.O.S.B. to move out at once and establish a defensive position with their left on the southern edge of Marcoing Copse. A little later, Major-General de Lisle, having made good his escape from Gouzeaucourt,[1] sent a staff officer to Marcoing with orders for the 88th Brigade to move across to the right flank of the division ; and on receipt of this message Br.-General Nelson ordered his battalions to positions of assembly south of the village.

Hence it was that the K.O.S.B. were the first in the field. The leading company was fired on from the copse before it was clear of Marcoing and as the rest of the battalion came into action it clashed with advancing Germans and began to drive them back steadily south-westward across the lower slopes of Welsh Ridge. Into this mêlée, company by company the 88th Brigade entered as it emerged from Marcoing. There was some confusion of units, but the personnel of brigade headquarters, headed by the brigade-major, set the right example ; and the skilful subordinate leadership of troops who displayed that instinctive grasp of the situation which comes of sound training soon had its reward. From the left of the K.O.S.B. the front was built up by the 2/Hampshire, 4/Worcestershire, 1/Essex and the Newfoundland Battalion in that order. The Germans, who had already fallen back from Marcoing Copse, retreated along the whole line, losing many killed and wounded and leaving about fifty prisoners in British hands.[2] Early in the afternoon Br.-General Lucas sent two companies of the 2/S. Wales Borderers back across the canal to clear the southern bank and join the left of the 88th Brigade with the 86th at les Rues Vertes. The troops were then digging in on a line which ran roughly westward from les Rues Vertes, bent back in the centre, and curved forward on the right where the K.O.S.B. linked up with troops of the 20th Division near the Hindenburg support system.

The counter-attack had removed all anxiety as to the fate of the guns which continued in action without pause. German field batteries were engaged as they came forward ; one caught on the move was destroyed, and others were

[1] See page 187.
[2] Mostly of the *99th Regt.* (*30th Div.*).

Digitized by Google

silenced after they had succeeded in coming into action.[1] But the task was too heavy for the twenty-nine 18-pdrs. and six 4·5-inch howitzers to which the divisional artillery was reduced. The enemy was still able to keep the trenches of the 16/Middlesex, beyond Masnières under a heavy bombardment, partly in enfilade, and to establish machine-guns within 800 yards of the front. This battalion bore its ordeal with amazing fortitude, heartened by its commanding-officer, Lieut.-Colonel J. Forbes-Robertson, who visited all positions in turn even when, blinded by a wound, he had to be led by the hand. In this part of the field, as elsewhere, the German field artillery was handled with great boldness, crossing the canal at and near Crèvecoeur on the heels of the attacking battalions. The teams and personnel of one battery were caught and destroyed by the fire of a machine-gun of the 86th Brigade.

Apart from an abortive attack upon the Royal Fusiliers at les Rues Vertes soon after 5 p.m. the assaults of the German infantry were not renewed in the afternoon ; and at night, on the defensive flank, it was found possible to withdraw the 2/Hampshire into reserve. The 87th Brigade, holding the left portion of the front from the Masnières—Cambrai road to the canal, had been under considerable shell-fire, including gas, from 6 a.m. onward, but the bombardment seemed intended to distract attention from the main operations rather than to serve as preparation for an attack. Some German patrols moved forward and these were dispersed by fire ; otherwise there was no infantry activity throughout the day.

For the time, at least, the German attack on the south side of the canal towards Marcoing and Ribécourt had been checked. By gallant and vigorous leadership and the admirable fighting qualities of the troops the 29th Division had saved itself and in doing so had saved the 6th Division and the right of the IV. Corps from a dangerous penetration of their right flank and rear.

The 6th Division (Major-General T. O. Marden) holding the left sector of the III. Corps front, was not attacked except on the extreme left where the enemy's attempt to advance

[1] During the day the artillery of the 29th Div. expended 11,500 rounds of 18-pdr. and 2,500 rounds of field howitzer ammunition.

Digitized by Google

against Cantaing[1], after a heavy bombardment was broken by artillery fire. As we have seen, the 16th Brigade, in divisional reserve, was ordered away about 10 a.m.[2] to cover Beaucamp against a probable German advance from Gouzeaucourt. Soon afterwards the 14/Durham L.I., reserve battalion of the 18th Brigade occupying the left sector of the front, was sent to Highland Ridge to take up a position facing south-east astride the Hindenburg support system. Two field companies R.E., 12th and 459th (W. Riding), were placed in reserve; and at 1.35 p.m. the III. Corps asked the IV. for assistance in manning the ridge. Accordingly the 2/6th Sherwood Foresters arrived later from the 59th Division to extend the line of the D.L.I. to the right. These dispositions were completed in the course of the afternoon when the 59th Division supplied another battalion in order that the line might be extended to the left, behind Marcoing. The 11/Leicestershire (Pioneers), which had just rejoined the 6th Division,[3] was kept at Ribécourt as reserve to the 18th Brigade.

The field batteries[4], which were in action west and south-west of Marcoing, moved back in succession during the day to positions near Ribécourt. Four 6-inch howitzers of the 87th Siege Battery located at the western end of Marcoing were heavily shelled, all communications being destroyed by 9 a.m. when the position came under desultory rifle fire. The detachments were eventually withdrawn to Fins and the same course was followed with the two howitzers of the battery in the Couillet Wood valley. In this vicinity four 60-pdrs. of the 2/1st Lancashire Heavy Battery were prepared for withdrawal before 10 a.m., the teams starting out from the wagon lines. As the situation seemed to improve the guns opened fire again, but heavy shelling then rendered two "hopelessly out of action", and damaged the others. The detachments were then withdrawn to Metz. A gun of this battery situated in a sunken road five hundred yards south of Marcoing was damaged by shell fire and abandoned.

---

[1] See Chapter XIII.

[2] See page 195.

[3] The battalion had been working, under the V. Corps, on the broad-gauge railway near Havrincourt, and only reached Ribécourt on the morning of 30th Nov.

[4] II. and XXIV. Bdes. and 277th Army Bde. R.F.A. Two batteries of the last named brigade were transferred to the 12th Div. at 10.35 a.m.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*continued*)

THE GERMAN COUNTER-STROKE, 30TH NOVEMBER (*concluded*)

IV. AND VI. CORPS: THE FIGHT ON THE BOURLON—MOEUVRES FRONT

(Sketches 14, 15)

On the front of the IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. L. Woollcombe) and of the right division of the VI. Corps (Lieut.-General J. A. L. Haldane) the German attack, delivered by Moser's Arras Group, did not aim at surprise: the enemy trusted to sheer weight of men and metal to smash the British line. Surprise, indeed, was hardly possible, for the British observers could scarcely fail to detect the assembly of large bodies of troops in the open country between Bourlon and Inchy.

The three divisions of the IV. Corps had all arrived after the conclusion of the corps' offensive on the 27th November; consequently, although comparatively fresh, they had had little time in which to organize and strengthen their defensive positions. The 47th Division, in the centre, was called upon to meet the German attack 24 hours after completing the relief of the 62nd Division, and could do little more in the way of preparation than thin out the front in Bourlon Wood, concentrate a larger reserve, and arrange, in concert with the other divisions, machine-gun barrages to cover its flanks. Having been in the line for two whole days and nights the 2nd Division, on the left, had managed to improve and reorganize its signal communications and move a number of batteries to positions better suited for defence. It had also taken considerable pains to co-ordinate the fire of its artillery and machine guns.

From dawn onward the German artillery fired steadily, but by no means accurately, upon the British batteries, and shelled Bourlon Wood with gas and high-explosive. The British guns were not slow to reply and the counter-battery duel continued until, at about 8.50 a.m., the enemy opened a fierce bombardment of the British front positions; of the line of the Bapaume—Cambrai road, including the sugar

Digitized by Google

factory where three guns of the 255th Machine-Gun Company (47th Division) were destroyed; and of the Graincourt area. At this time the enemy was reported to be concentrating north-west of Bourlon village in the vicinity of Deligny mill. Then followed the assault.

The 59th Division (Major-General C. F. Romer),[1] holding the right sector of the IV. Corps from the edge of Cantaing to a point in Bourlon Wood, did not lie in the path of the German main attack. Hostile artillery fire set Cantaing mill ablaze, and the battalions in the wood suffered heavy casualties from gas; but only two not very formidable infantry assaults were made against Br.-General T. G. Cope's 176th Brigade which held the front. The first effort, partly directed towards Cantaing, was made at 9 a.m. and broke up under British artillery fire,[2] the second, launched between 11 a.m. and noon against the centre battalion, 2/5th N. Staffordshire south-west of Fontaine, suffered a similar fate.[3]

As we have seen, the German advance towards Marcoing resulted in the 59th Division being ordered to move two battalions to Highland Ridge,[4] where, with eight machine guns, they helped to build up a second line, facing south-east, which the 6th Division had begun to form. These battalions were provided by the 178th Brigade (Br.-General T. W. Stansfeld) in divisional reserve at Ribécourt. About the same time, towards noon, orders were given to prepare Flesquières for all-round defence under the command of Br.-General C. H. L. James whose 177th Brigade was in or near the village.[5] As another precaution the corps had ordered that the heavy and siege batteries in action round Ribécourt should be withdrawn to positions south-west of

[1] On the evening of the 29th Nov. advanced divisional H.Q. had been moved back from Flesquières to Trescault (2½ miles away to the S.S.W.) to escape the fire of the German artillery.

[2] The artilleries of the Guards Div. and the 51st Div. were still in action on this front, and one brigade of the 61st Div. had arrived.

[3] Lance-Corpl. J. Thomas of this battalion won the V.C. for his gallantry and enterprise in the reconnaissance of the buildings at the western end of Fontaine; he stayed out for three hours, shot several German snipers, and gathered valuable information.

[4] See page 211 and Sketch 14.

[5] Less one battalion at la Justice in reserve to the 176th Bde. Half a machine-gun company and a Stokes mortar battery were also included in the garrison of Flesquières. The 469th Field Coy. R.E. was already at work on the defences.

Digitized by Google

Havrincourt, but the counter-attack of the 88th Brigade and K.O.S.B. (29th Division)[1] rendered the right rear of the IV. Corps tolerably secure and the movement of the artillery was not carried out.

The greater portion of the sector held by the 47th Division (Major-General Sir G. F. Gorringe),[2] next to the 59th Division, was in Bourlon Wood, only that occupied by the 1/6th London, left battalion of Br.-General H. B. P. L. Kennedy's 140th Brigade, lying outside it on the ridge beyond the western edge. On the right the two front battalions of the 141st Brigade (Br.-General J. F. Erskine) were not much troubled, although the 1/17th London, next to the 140th Brigade, was called upon about 11.30 a.m. to check some enemy movement, which it did by good shooting. At 2.44 p.m. a German concentration along the line of the railway north-east of the wood was broken up by artillery and machine-gun fire in response to an S.O.S. call of the brigade. Most serious was the plight of the 1/19th London occupying a support position in the wood: the battalion was so heavily gassed that only nine officers and 61 other ranks remained fit for duty. These survivors were reinforced in the afternoon by the 1/22nd London from the 142nd Brigade (Br.-General V. T. Bailey) lying in reserve in the Hindenburg support system west of Flesquières, whilst six guns of the 255th Machine-Gun Company were placed at the disposal of the 141st Company which had likewise suffered severely from gas.

Before 9.30 a.m. the 1/6th London, holding the ridge outside Bourlon Wood to the west, had observed large bodies of Germans moving south-westward from behind Bourlon village. Two hostile observation balloons in this locality were soon joined by a third, the bombardment grew heavier, and then the left of the great German assault bore down upon the left of the Londoners whose artillery responded promptly and with great effect.[3] The fire of rifles, Lewis guns and machine guns also slew many Germans, but the assaulting waves pressed on, receiving close support from

[1] See page 209.

[2] Advanced divisional H.Q. were at Havrincourt.

[3] The artilleries of the 40th and 62nd Divs. with two Army brigades (V.R.H.A. and LXXVII. R.F.A.) covered the front of the 47th Div.

Digitized by Google

guns in Bourlon village, and from low-flying aeroplanes.[1] Unfortunately the 1/6th London and the troops of the 2nd Division on its left were not in close touch, so the Germans were able to work their way forward round that flank. Soon after 2 p.m. this movement, combined with a desperate frontal assault, overwhelmed the survivors of two and a half companies of the 1/6th and drove the battalion off the crest of the ridge. Germans then appeared on the left rear of the 1/15th London, next on the right, and obliged this battalion to form a defensive flank facing west along the edge of Bourlon Wood.

Counter-attacks delivered by the reserve company of the 1/6th London, battalion headquarters, and a company of the 1/8th London hurried forward from the Hindenburg support system near Graincourt, regained some ground but did not reach the crest of the ridge. Two more companies of the 1/8th assisted in the consolidation of the new position which was linked up with the 1/15th London. By means of counter-attack, delivered in the face of heavy fire, this battalion had now succeeded in swinging forward its left.[2]

In front of the 2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira)[3] the German assembly for attack was plainly to be seen as soon as the hostile bombardment concentrated upon the forward positions. Large bodies of troops were advancing southward from Quarry Wood, whilst others were moving into Moeuvres. The British artillery[4] and machine guns inflicted tremendous losses on this array, 9·2-inch howitzer batteries having, it was said, the rare satisfaction of seeing the effect of 106 fuzes on infantry and field guns in the open. Two German batteries which rashly attempted to drive into action near Quarry Wood were overwhelmed, after one battery had fired three rounds and the other only one. As the attacking waves of infantry drew nearer, a battery of eight machine guns fired 70,000 rounds into them.

[1] The Germans made an almost systematic use of aeroplanes to support their infantry attacks on this day, whilst the R.F.C. dropped 111 25-lb. bombs and fired 20,000 rounds against ground targets on the Bourlon—Moeuvres front. See "The War in the Air" Vol. IV. pp. 253–4.

At 12.30 p.m. the IV. Corps informed the Army by telephone that "the "15th Sqdn. R.F.C. was unable to clear up the situation on the corps "front on account of numerous enemy scouts north of Bourlon".

[2] The 1/6th London lost 13 officers and 369 other ranks, and the 1/15th London 11 officers and 288 other ranks.

[3] Divisional H.Q. were at Ytres, 5 miles S.W. of Havrincourt.

[4] The artillery of the 2nd Div. (XXXVI. and XLI. Bdes. R.F.A.) and of the 36th Div., with the XCIII. A.F.A. Bde. covered the front.

Digitized by Google

Nevertheless the Germans pressed forward with amazing persistence. On the extreme right the 1/R. Berkshire of the 99th Brigade (Br.-General R. O. Kellett) was assisted by the enfilade fire of three machine guns belonging to the 47th Division; but four advanced posts were over-run, the survivors holding on grimly in shell-holes farther back.[1] Two companies of the 23/Royal Fusiliers were moved up without delay to reinforce the Berkshire. About 12.30 p.m. brigade headquarters received a report, which happily proved to be false, that the Germans had penetrated as far as the sugar factory on the Bapaume—Cambrai road; in consequence the 2/Oxford & Bucks L.I. and the 24/Royal Fusiliers were moved forward, ready to counter-attack, from the 5th Brigade (Br.-General W. Bullen-Smith) in divisional reserve at Hermies.[2]

On the left of the Berkshire the situation of the 17/Royal Fusiliers (attached from the 5th Brigade) was, for a time, critical. Ordered to thin out their advanced positions in the Hindenburg support system and concentrate upon the defence of their main line, the Fusiliers were involved in close fighting before this could be done. Captain W. N. Stone, who organized the withdrawal of his company, stayed with the covering platoon and sent back much valuable information until he and his party were surrounded. They fought to the last.[3] Desperate fighting with rifle, bomb and bayonet continued until a counter-attack of the Fusiliers made the line safe and enabled forward blocks to be established in the Hindenburg support system. To the left of the Fusiliers were two companies of the 1/K.R.R.C. whose Lewis-gun and rifle fire caught with deadly effect the waves of Germans which made repeated attempts to surmount a slight rise some two hundred yards in front of the position. Eight guns of the 99th Machine-Gun Company, on the left of the Rifles, also took their toll, as did part of the 6th and 242nd Machine-Gun Companies, which in positions west of the Canal du Nord covered the whole area from

[1] The *221st Div.*, moving with its left on the western side of Bourlon Wood, had Anneux and Graincourt for its immediate objectives. See page 228.

[2] The *214th Div.* was ordered to roll up the Hindenburg support system from the north, the left of the division to cross the Bapaume—Cambrai road at the sugar factory. See page 228.

[3] The posthumous award of the Victoria Cross was made to Capt. Stone.

Digitized by Google

Moeuvres to the "shoulder" of the Hindenburg support system.

At 11.25 a.m. the 99th Brigade had to face another determined assault. The enemy made some headway against the left of the Berkshire, but was thrown out by a counter-attack delivered by a company of the battalion and one of the 23/Royal Fusiliers. At 12.10 p.m. the British artillery smashed an attack before it could close; but about 2.30 p.m., after the Germans had driven in the left flank of the 47th Division, some forward posts held by the right company of the Berkshire were over-run after a desperate struggle. It was reported that when this ground was recaptured two days later the German dead lay so thick that the bodies of our own men could not be discovered. Finally, at 4 p.m. a fierce but unavailing attack was made upon the block established in the Hindenburg support system by the 17/Royal Fusiliers; and the enemy's losses were increased by the fire of an 18-pdr. battery which enfiladed a trench packed with retreating Germans. No more attacks were delivered against the front of the brigade. A gap which developed on the extreme right was filled about dusk by a company of the 23/Royal Fusiliers, the enemy having made no effort to turn the situation to account.

The 6th Brigade (Br.-General R. K. Walsh), holding the left sector of the 2nd Division astride the Canal du Nord was tried no less severely. The 13/Essex occupied Canal Trench, Lock 5, and the trench on the western bank running back to the Hindenburg front system. At 9.30 a.m. the battalion beat off, chiefly by rifle and Lewis-gun fire, an attack from the north-east. An hour later the Germans put a box barrage round the lock and canal crossing; then, renewing the attack in greater force, they drove back into Canal Trench the company of the Essex which had defended the lock until all bombs and ammunition were spent.[1] Part of the 2/S. Staffordshire was brought up to assist in restoring the situation, but no counter-attack succeeded in dislodging the enemy from Lock 5.

West of the Canal du Nord at 10.25 a.m. a German attack from the shattered houses of Moeuvres drove deeply into the defences of the 1/King's which held the old support

[1] Two guns of the 99th Machine-Gun Coy. in position at the lock had to be abandoned.

Digitized by Google

trench of the Hindenburg front system. The right company of the King's was overwhelmed, for the enemy pressed on regardless of the losses inflicted by rifle, Lewis-gun and Stokes mortar fire, and about 11 a.m. parties of Germans approached battalion headquarters in the old Hindenburg front line. The struggle in this vicinity continued throughout the afternoon and evening, the 17/Middlesex, part of the 2/S. Staffordshire, and a company of the 10/Duke of Cornwall's L.I. (Pioneers) reinforcing the King's. Captain A. McReady-Diarmid of the 17/Middlesex, himself a bomber of great prowess who slew scores of Germans,[1] led many of the counter-attacks which eventually enabled the defenders to secure and consolidate the old German front line.[2]

The enemy's advance had isolated the company of the 13/Essex in the forward trench connecting with Lock 5, and repeated attempts, made with artillery and Stokes mortar assistance, to reach the survivors all failed. After dark two runners made their way back and reported that the two surviving officers, the company sergeant-major, and the platoon sergeants had unanimously agreed to fight to the last.[3]

On the left, where the line of the King's joined that of the 56th Division an attack delivered about 10.35 a.m. had broken in between the two divisions. The King's, taken in front and flank, lost the support line of the Hindenburg front system. Then the Germans advanced along the communication trenches and also from shell-hole to shell-hole across the open, but were driven back by rifle and Lewis-gun fire, bomb and bayonet. Part of the 17/Middlesex having reinforced the defence, blocks were established in the communication trenches and the whole position securely established, as it was on the right, along the old German front line

[1] In the fighting of the following day Capt. McReady-Diarmid again distinguished himself, but was killed in action. He received the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

[2] Prisoners taken south of Moeuvres belonged to the *225th Res. Regt.* (*49th Res. Div.*) which attacked with its left on the canal. East of the canal was the *226th Res. Regt.* next to the *363rd Regt.* (*214th Div.*). The *49th Res. Div.* was expected to sweep southward astride the Hindenburg front system and the Canal du Nord.

[3] The casualties of the 13/Essex amounted to 10 officers and 372 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

The 56th Division (Major-General F. A. Dudgeon), holding the right sector of the VI. Corps next to the 2nd Division, had been in the line continuously since the British offensive opened on the 20th November. Saddled with the responsibility of safeguarding the western flank of the Bourlon—Moeuvres operations, it had had much hard fighting—most of it bombing along trenches—and was clearly due for relief.

The artillery covering the division put down a protective barrage as soon as the enemy was observed to be forming up for attack, and the batteries were still firing when S.O.S. signals were seen about 10.45 a.m. The 1/16th London (Queen's Westminster Rifles) of the 169th Brigade (Br.-General E. S. D'E. Coke) had soon to deal with an enemy penetration on its right, where the battalion linked up with the King's of the 2nd Division ; and the Germans also worked forward round the other flank. Casualties were heavy—here as elsewhere the wide trenches afforded little cover from German *Minenwerfer* fire—and the defenders were worried by low-flying air attacks. Nevertheless the Lewis guns of the Londoners did great execution ; and, after the front line was lost, bombing parties made the Germans pay dearly for their advance along the communication trenches. Before 2 p.m., however, the Queen's Westminster Rifles had been forced back to the old Hindenburg front line ; but here, reinforced by two companies of the 1/9th London (Queen Victoria's Rifles) the defence held. Next on the left the 1/2nd London was also assailed on both flanks and conducted a fighting withdrawal to the same line with the help of the remainder of the 1/9th London.

In the left sector of the divisional front the 168th Brigade (Br.-General G. G. Loch) passed through a similar ordeal. Its supporting field artillery[1] was able to enfilade with deadly effect the German trenches north of Tadpole Copse, and found good targets in enemy troops advancing across the open near Inchy ; east of that village two German field batteries moving into action were scattered, an 8-inch howitzer battery completing their destruction. A well-planned machine-gun defence also killed many Germans ; yet the advance persisted and could be checked only by sheer hard fighting in the trenches.

[1] The group consisted of the VII. Bde. R.H.A. (from 1st Cav. Div.) ; and A/281 Bty. and 2 guns of D/281 Bty. of the divisional artillery.

Digitized by Google

On the right the 1/8th Middlesex (attached from the 167th Brigade)[1] was, for a time, in a critical situation, the enemy penetrating to battalion headquarters. The commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel C. H. Pank,[2] who was wounded later, rallied all the men he could and led a successful counter-attack in which a company of the 1/13th London (Kensington) took part; and, after the struggle had continued for most of the afternoon, the attempts of the Germans to gain a footing in the old front line of the Hindenburg front system were defeated. This inroad upon the Middlesex threatened to cut off the London Scottish on the left at Tadpole Copse. The battalion appeared to be assailed from all sides; but, with the assistance of two companies of the Kensington, a successful withdrawal was carried out to the old German front line, in touch on the right with the Middlesex and on the left with the 1/4th London holding the defensive flank.

Reports from the two forward brigades had shown Major-General Dudgeon how hard pressed were his tired troops. The three remaining battalions of the 167th Brigade were moved up from Frémicourt to the Beugny[3]—Doignies area during the afternoon and at 3.20 p.m. the 168th Brigade was informed that preparations were in hand to withdraw to the old British front line: if such a step should become necessary the 168th Brigade was to cover the movement. Happily the need for such withdrawal did not arise, although when darkness fell the German effort, so long sustained, was not yet exhausted. Fierce bombing encounters were still in progress at some of the blocks in the communication trenches.

The successful defence of the Bourlon—Moeuvres front against the repeated and determined assaults of the German masses backed by a powerful artillery may be rated as an outstanding British achievement in the war on the Western Front. The courage and endurance of troops who had confidence in their weapons and knew how to use them, the gallant and resourceful leadership of subordinate commanders, and the soundly organized and well directed

[1] The 167th Bde. (Br.-Gen. G. H. B. Freeth) had been relieved in the line on the left of the 168th on the previous night by the 3rd Div. The brigade was now in reserve at Frémicourt, 6 miles west of Hermies.

[2] He escaped from his headquarters dug-out by one exit as Germans began to throw bombs down the other.

[3] Beugny is 4 miles west of Doignies.

Digitized by Google

artillery and machine-gun defence had combined to inflict upon Moser's divisions a bloody repulse which went far towards foiling the whole German plan.[1]

The General Situation: Events of the Night 30th November/1st December

At 10 a.m. on the 30th November, G.H.Q. was informed by the Third Army that the Germans had attacked the 55th Division at 8 a.m. and made progress; also that the Bourlon —Moeuvres front was engaged. Although no details were available at this time it was known soon afterwards that a serious situation had arisen on the right of the III. Corps. Before noon the Commander-in-Chief arrived at Albert. He counselled General Byng to use his reserves energetically, and told him that steps had already been taken to bring reinforcements from other parts of the British front. Among these reinforcements were two divisions which had been selected to begin, early in December, the promised relief of the French front on the right of the Third Army.

At 11.25 a.m. G.H.Q. informed the Third Army by telephone that the 21st Division and the 9th Division would be the first to arrive, the infantry by rail and the artillery by road from the First Army area. These would be followed by the 25th Division. The full programme of reinforcements arranged by G.H.Q. and the dates of their arrival was sent over the telephone at 6.5 p.m. and communicated by the Army, without delay, to all corps; and they were also informed which formations had been allotted to them. The list was as follows:

1st December: 21st Division and 9th Division to VII. Corps. Both from First Army.

2nd December: 25th Division from Second Army; two A.F.A. Brigades to III. Corps; one A.F.A. brigade to VII. Corps.

3rd December: two heavy batteries to VII. Corps; two A.F.A. brigades to VII. Corps; one A.F.A. brigade to III. Corps.

[1] G.H.Q. afterwards took the unusual course of circulating an account of the operations of the 47th, 2nd and 56th Divs. on the 30th Nov. by means of a pamphlet called "The Story of a Great Fight".

Digitized by Google

4th December: three siege (9.2-inch how.) batteries to VII. Corps and one to III. Corps; one siege (8-inch how.) battery to VII. Corps and one to III. Corps.

In addition six 6-inch how. batteries would come by road to the VII Corps.

Twenty-four infantry trains and twelve artillery trains could be expected daily. The bulk of the artillery, badly needed in consequence of the Third Army's heavy loss in guns, was despatched from Flanders; and it was inevitable that these railway movements should retard the transportation of the 5th Division from France to Italy.

G.H.Q. had also called upon the French for assistance in case of attack against the right of the Third Army. During the day General Pétain arranged that the French XIV. Corps (129th and 154th Divisions) should move by motor transport to the Athies—Vermand[1] area ready to come into action under General Byng by the afternoon of the 2nd December. Also, the French 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions, which had not yet entirely vacated the Péronne area, were to stand fast and await further orders.

Apart from the cavalry the Third Army had few reserves of its own which were readily available. It has been related how two divisions of the Cavalry Corps moved northward, behind the VII. Corps front, on Gauche Wood; how one cavalry division advanced from the west against the same objective; how the Guards were used for the recovery of Gouzeaucourt with Vincent's Force holding firm on their right; and how as many tanks as possible were employed in the operations in this part of the field.[2]

The relief of the 16th Division by the 40th Division in the VI. Corps line north-west of Bullecourt was allowed to proceed; but the 36th Division which was on its way to join the First Army was ordered back to the Bapaume (VI. Corps) area, and the 51st Division, refitting west of Albert, was hastily entrained for Bapaume where it arrived at night. The 61st Division, already on its way south from the XVII. Corps, arrived at Bapaume in the afternoon and replaced the Guards Division in the Trescault—Metz—Ruyaulcourt area in Army reserve. None of these troops could enter the battle before the following day.

[1] Vermand is 4 miles S.W. of Pontruet, where the right of the Third Army (VII. Corps) joined the French front.

[2] See pages 188–92 and Sketch 14.

Digitized by Google

The Third Army's chief anxiety was the situation of the III. Corps and of the left of the VII. Corps, but there was hope that Quentin Ridge and Gonnelieu might be recovered. At 2.35 p.m. the III. Corps reported by telephone that the 29th Division was still holding its original line, Masnières—Marcoing, a message which hardly conveyed a true picture of the difficulties of the division which, after the establishment of its defensive flank from Welsh Ridge to les Rues Vertes, was holding a narrow salient bisected for almost its entire length by the St. Quentin canal. In the opinion of the brigade commanders the position could not be held for long against a heavy and sustained assault.

The III. Corps had urged into action without delay all the troops placed at its disposal to stem the German advance which had reached Gouzeaucourt and threatened to penetrate to Sorel—Metz—Trescault ; but the success of these counter-attacks was limited, partly owing to the failure to co-ordinate them. It must be remembered, however, that the headquarters of formations were liable—sometimes impelled —to sudden change of location, that disorganized signal communications had to be re-established, and that accurate information was slow to come in. For instance at 11.25 a.m. la Vacquerie was erroneously reported to be lost and the truth was not known at III. Corps headquarters until more than two hours later.

As a precautionary measure, in case the weight of the German attack should penetrate the Bourlon—Moeuvres front, the Army had ordered the IV. Corps at 10.30 a.m. to be prepared to move back the artillery in the Graincourt valley. At 4 p.m., however, the corps sent a reassuring telephone message : all attacks had been beaten off " except " for possible minor losses of ground ". Needless to say the replacement of IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. L. Woollcombe) headquarters by that of the V. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe), due to take place on the afternoon of the 30th November, was postponed ; but only for 24 hours.

During the morning the IV. Corps had taken measures to establish a second position. At 11.45 a.m. the 59th and 47th Divisions were ordered to garrison the Hindenburg front and support systems from the corps right boundary to Hughes Support, the 2nd Division to continue the line west of the Canal du Nord. This position was to be held lightly, so

Digitized by Google

that as large a mobile reserve as possible could be kept in hand. The 62nd Division, whose departure into a rest area had been cancelled, was the only division remaining in corps reserve and two of its brigades were moved : the 185th from Beaumetz (1½ miles west of Doignies) to Hermies, attached to the 47th Division, and the 186th from the Hindenburg support system south-west of Graincourt to the vicinity of Lock 7, attached to the 2nd Division which appeared more likely to need assistance.[1]

It was certain that, on the morrow, the Germans would resume their attacks upon Metz from the high ground Gauche Wood—Quentin Ridge—Gonnelieu Ridge, barely more than three miles away. To forestall the enemy, the Third Army issued orders in the evening for a counter-attack to be delivered at an early hour. The plan was ambitious, considering that no fresh troops would be available so soon and that the requisite artillery support could hardly be provided ; the VII. and III. Corps were to attack from Fleeceall Post to Gonnelieu with the object of recapturing the old British front line, the Cavalry Corps co-operating with the III. Corps.

The Cavalry Corps order, issued at 6.40 p.m.,[2] directed the 5th Cavalry Division and the Lucknow Brigade of the 4th Cavalry Division to attack Gauche Wood and Villers Guislain with tank assistance, the 4th Cavalry Division to be ready to follow up and seize Villers Ridge. At 7 p.m. the III. Corps ordered the II. Tank Brigade to collect all available tanks in the hollow west of Vaucelette Farm ready to attack Villers Guislain and Villers Ridge at dawn ; but to leave 20 tanks, which were already in the vicinity of Queen's Cross, to co-operate with the Guards Division. At 10.35 p.m. the corps counter-attack order, issued at 10 p.m.[3] was received verbally by the commander of the Guards Division : the Guards were to co-operate with the cavalry and tanks, their own objective being Quentin Ridge and Gonnelieu. At midnight the division was informed that zero hour was fixed for 6.30 a.m., but that if the night attacks of the 60th and 16th Brigades succeeded, the Guards would merely relieve these brigades on Quentin Ridge.

[1] Br.-Gen. R. B. Bradford, V.C., commanding the 186th Bde., was killed by a shell not far from his headquarters.

[2] See Appendix 17.

[3] See Appendix 18.

Digitized by Google

Lieut.-General Snow, commanding the VII. Corps which had received no reinforcements whatever and was hard put to it to preserve a continuous line, spoke on the telephone with Lieut.-General Pulteney at 9.50 p.m. and promised to support the III. Corps attack with the fire of his exiguous artillery. It was all he could do; but at midnight it was arranged that the 164th and 166th Brigades of the 55th Division should keep in close touch with the cavalry attack on their left and advance their line if opportunity arose, "but only if the cavalry are known to have reached and "secured an objective". At the same hour, however, Lieut.-General Snow issued an order to the effect that all gun limbers and teams were to move up near the battery positions by dawn, in case a heavy enemy attack should compel a further withdrawal.

The night of the 30th November/1st December was dark, but the weather was fine and comparatively mild for so late in the year. Behind the battle front there was little rest for anyone: the German drive across the communications of the III. Corps had resulted in much disorganization, and the work of getting rations, ammunition, and other supplies to the forward troops was arduous. Some local adjustments and reliefs were carried out and there was a considerable movement of batteries, the IV. Corps being called upon to repair, to some extent, the losses of the III. Tractors succeeded in withdrawing from Gouzeaucourt a number of heavy howitzers.

In the right sector of the 55th Division (VII. Corps) the enemy, in the mistaken belief that Fleeceall Post had been abandoned sent two companies to occupy it. They were dispersed, leaving three prisoners[1] in the hands of the 1/5th King's. An attempt by a company of the 1/5th King's Own to relieve Limerick Post[2] failed with some casualties, but before dawn the garrison withdrew to the British lines, meeting with no opposition.

The 60th Brigade (20th Division) in its position between Gouzeaucourt and Gonnelieu carried out a hasty reconnaissance before the light failed. The 6/K. Shropshire L.I. advanced on the right at 1 a.m., working forward along the railway and then turning left-handed to assault Quentin

[1] Of the *440th Res. Regt. (183rd Div.)*.

[2] See page 181.

Digitized by Google

Ridge from the west. Although an advanced trench was captured and a number of Germans killed, strong opposition barred further progress; and a combined attempt of the 6/Oxford & Bucks L.I. and 12/Rifle Brigade to enter Gonnelieu under the cover of trench-mortar fire did not succeed.

Br.-General Walker, who knew nothing of the plan to attack Quentin Ridge at 6.30 a.m., intended his 16th Brigade to assault at 1 a.m., hoping to surprise the enemy. He heard of the 60th Brigade operation only a quarter of an hour before: nevertheless he put his troops in, and the 6/K. Shropshire L.I. withdrew to clear the way. The new advance was made by the 2/York & Lancaster, 1/K. Shropshire L.I. and two companies of the 1/Buffs, but all were strange to the ground and found it impossible to keep direction. Under considerable machine-gun fire a halt was called and the brigade was then withdrawn to its old position near the railway north of Gouzeaucourt.[1] The failure was known to the Guards Division at 2.45 a.m. and was reported to the III. Corps by the 6th Division about three hours later.

The Germans were too much occupied in the reorganization of their forward troops and in general preparations for a resumption of their attacks in the morning to attempt any important aggressive action during the night. But Bourlon Wood was subjected to a violent bombardment of gas and high-explosive from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m., and the two battalions of the 59th Division which were in the wood suffered severely, the losses of the 2/6th S. Staffordshire amounting to 350 of all ranks and those of the 2/6th N. Staffordshire to 318. On the front of the 6th Brigade (2nd Division) astride the Canal du Nord bomb fighting in the trenches continued.

NOTE

The Germans on the 30th November[2]

On this day, the first day of the first offensive launched against the British on the Western Front since "Second Ypres" in 1915, the Germans had to be content with a limited success. O.H.L. were well satisfied with the reports received up to noon; thereafter it seemed that hopes of a substantial success were to be

[1] Here Major B. L. Strauss, commanding the 1/Buffs, was killed.

[2] Chiefly from G.O.A. xiii, Rupprecht, Ludendorff, Moser, and information supplied by the *Reichsarchiv* and the *Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres*.

Digitized by Google

disappointed. The moral effect upon the German troops who had fought so long on the defensive is said to have been beneficial.

Rupprecht considered that the *Second Army* allowed the attack from the east to deviate from its true objective in order to help the thrust from the north. At 9 p.m. he reminded Marwitz that it was more important to get forward south of Havrincourt Wood than to arrive at Trescault ; but he observed that " if the success " is not so great as we hoped, it has nevertheless given the British " a blow ".

In the Busigny Group the *183rd Division* fulfilled its task of advancing south of Villers Guislain and forming a defensive flank facing south-west. The right division of the Group, the *34th* with one infantry regiment, and two field artillery regiments of the *208th Division*[1] attached, formed the left of the main thrust and was expected to put its chief weight on the right. " The " quicker the *208th* and *34th Divisions* push towards Fins the " better ", Sorel and Fins, both inclusive, being their final objectives. However, although Villers Guislain proved an easy conquest the resistance of Vincent's Force and of the sappers, pioneers, and other contingents hastily assembled west of Gouzeaucourt slowed up the advance ; and in the afternoon the British counter-attacks prevented further progress.

The left of the Caudry Group, *28th* and *220th Divisions*, was to move straight on Metz, enveloping at an early stage of the advance the British defences in the vicinity of the Péronne—Cambrai road ; but the *28th Division* was checked north of Gonnelieu and the *220th*, on its right, delayed the whole advance because it could not overcome the British resistance (12th Division, III. Corps) in the neighbourhood of la Vacquerie which was not taken. The two divisions had become mixed together and a gap had developed between the *28th* and the *34th*, right of the Busigny Group.

Losses, especially in officers, were heavy ; and the attack formation adopted—small groups which sought to filter through between the British centres of resistance—often resulted in loss of control. The troops forming the spearhead of the German attack on the 30th November were insufficiently trained in the tactical methods which were to achieve success in the enemy's spring offensive of 1918.[2]

Congestion of traffic upon the roads in rear affected the forward flow of troops, ammunition and supplies.

About noon the *185th Division* in Army reserve about Esnes[3] was ordered forward to carry the advance into la Vacquerie,

[1] The remainder of the *208th Div.* was kept back east of Honnecourt in Army reserve.

[2] Ludendorff remarks upon " half-tired " troops who had not been specially trained for the attack.

[3] See Sketch 13.

Digitized by Google

whilst the Busigny Group tried to fill the gap on its right by pushing up the *9th Bavarian Reserve Division* from its position in reserve south-east of Bantouzelle. But neither division could get its leading troops into action before darkness fell.

Next on the right the *30th Division* which crossed the St. Quentin canal at les Rues des Vignes and Crèvecoeur had the Flesquières ridge for objective ; it was to mask les Rues Vertes and Marcoing with weak forces. After its successful attack upon the 20th Division, however, it swung too far to the right and then recoiled before the counter-attack from Marcoing of the 29th Division. The *9th Reserve Division*, coming up on the left of the *30th*, was expected to penetrate as far as the high ground about Beaucamp and Trescault, but accomplished little. It met with a stubborn resistance north of la Vacquerie. Also, little was achieved by the *107th Division* forming the right of the Caudry Group, for this division was expected to cover the flank of the *30th* by attacking Noyelles, which it did not do, and to co-operate with the *119th* (left of the Arras Group) in an assault upon Cantaing which started but soon came to nothing.

The *119th Division*, which was ordered by Moser to secure Cantaing and establish itself about la Justice was checked by machine-gun fire ; and the troops were too tired to persevere.

As regards the main attack of the Arras Group the preliminary concentration was accomplished without difficulty ; satisfactory support was provided by Moser's 500 guns, although the wind tore gaps in the smoke screen laid by the heavy howitzers ; and the British aeroplanes were " cleared away ". Yet the divisions could not secure their objectives. The *221st Division*, attacking west of Bourlon Wood was to capture Anneux and Graincourt and get its left into Orival Wood ; but the delay in securing the ridge (held by the left battalion of the 47th Division) west of Bourlon Wood proved fatal to success. The *214th Division*, sweeping down the old Hindenburg support system and over the Bapaume—Cambrai road was to capture the sugar factory in its advance, and the *49th Reserve Division*, clearing the old Hindenburg front system in similar fashion, was also to cross the pavé road ; but the progress made was too slow and too costly for so much to be accomplished. However, " the bloody struggle in " Bourlon and Bourlon Wood was stopped by the attack of the " 30th ". The Arras Group claimed 450 prisoners.

For the renewal of the offensive on the 1st December the *Second Army* named the " Beaucamp—Trescault heights " as the objective. The main attack from the vicinity of Gonnelieu, to be delivered north-westward by Villers Plouich, was entrusted to the *185th Division* (Caudry Group) and *9th Bavarian Reserve Division* (Busigny Group). The *34th Division*, on the left of the Bavarians, was to envelop Gouzeaucourt from the north and the *208th* and *183rd*, farther to the left again, were to straighten out

Digitized by Google

the defensive flank running roughly south-eastward from Gauche Wood. Caudry Group required the *28th Division* to take la Vacquerie in its advance on the right of the *185th*, whilst the *220th* and *9th Reserve* pushed forward to the Couillet Wood valley but no farther. The *30th Division* was to capture les Rues Vertes.

Zero hour was fixed for 9.30 a.m. (8.30 a.m. British time) and all divisions were warned that the British might counter-attack before this hour. The *79th Reserve Division* would be in Army reserve between Bantouzelle and Honnecourt, and the Army also announced the impending arrival of additional reinforcements: the *24th Reserve Division*, from Belgium,[1] in Cambrai (reserve to the Group of Armies); the *16th Reserve Division* from Russia in the area between Lesdain and Caudry (O.H.L. reserve); and the *10th Division*, from the Aisne, in the Fresnoy area about ten miles north-east of St. Quentin (O.H.L. reserve).

[1] It had arrived in Belgium from Russia at the beginning of Nov.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917
(*continued*)

THE GERMAN COUNTER-STROKE, 1ST DECEMBER
(Sketch 15, 16, 17)

This day witnessed the definite failure of the German plan, although the British counter-attacks failed to accomplish all that was hoped of them. The Commander-in-Chief visited General Byng in the afternoon, but could do nothing to influence the situation. Apart from ensuring that a vigorous defence was maintained along the remainder of the threatened front the Third Army had not the means for further action.[1]

All tanks, except those engaged under the III. Corps and Cavalry Corps, were ordered into Army reserve, and those still in action were to be withdrawn, likewise, at night. As an afterthought 16 tanks were ordered forward from Metz to a position behind Gonnelieu—la Vacquerie for counter-attack in case of need. The French XIV. Corps, arriving in the Caulaincourt—Athies (respectively 8 and 13½ miles west of St. Quentin) area was now at the disposal of the Third Army.

The Germans were much less active in the air and, in spite of mist and low cloud, the R.F.C. was able to supply reconnaissance reports of distinct value. British aeroplanes attacked a number of ground targets with bombs and with Lewis-gun fire.

THE CAVALRY ATTACKS SOUTH OF GAUCHE WOOD[2]

For the attack to be delivered at dawn by the Cavalry Corps, in co-operation with that of the III. Corps (Guards Division), the chief rôle was allotted to the 5th Cavalry Division (Major-General H. J. M. Macandrew) to which was attached the Lucknow Brigade (Br.-General M. F. Gage) of the 4th Cavalry Division.[3] This brigade was given Villers

[1] Sir Douglas Haig issued an Order of the Day congratulating the Army on its successful resistance during the 30th November, and making special mention of the 2nd, 47th and 56th Divs.

[2] See Sketch 16.

[3] See Appendix 17.

Digitized by Google

Guislain as its objective, whilst the Ambala Brigade, whose attack will be described later, moved on Gauche Wood. As zero hour was fixed for 6.30 a.m. the troops assembled in darkness ready to advance with the first faint light of dawn.[1] South of Vaucelette Farm all movement would be through the line of posts and hastily dug trenches held by the troops of the 55th Division (VII. Corps); but the cavalry had little idea of the locations of the infantry and were no better informed of the German strength and dispositions.

The tanks which were to lead the cavalry attacks assembled in the region of Revelon Farm,[2] but too much was expected of the II. Tank Brigade. At very short notice the brigade had risen admirably to the occasion on the previous day; now it was found impossible to get fit for action in time the six tanks allotted for the attack on Villers Guislain with the Lucknow Brigade. These tanks were due to pass between Chapel Hill and Vaucelette Farm at zero hour, but another and shorter route was selected—literally at the eleventh hour: they were to move direct from Genin Well Copse (No. 2), passing close to Gauche Wood. This alteration in the tank plan was not known to the Lucknow Brigade until 5.45 a.m. when the leading regiments, 36th Jacob's Horse and Jodhpur Lancers, each accompanied by a section of the 12th Machine-Gun Squadron, were formed up on foot astride the Peizière—Villers Guislain road, 600 yards south of Vaucelette Farm.[3] It was clearly impossible to move the troops away to the north-west in time to establish contact with the tanks, although an attempt was made to do so, and eventually the brigade relied upon its own efforts.[4] It had no artillery support, for the guns of the 5th Cavalry Division were fully engaged farther north in covering the Gauche Wood attack made by the Ambala Brigade.[5] Twelve guns of the 12th Machine-Gun Squadron fired on the western exits of Villers Guislain.

[1] The sun rose at 7.45 a.m.

[2] Nineteen tanks (10 from H, 2 from A, and 7 from B Battalion) had been collected; but two broke down before zero hour. According to the Cavalry Corps operation order (see Appendix 17) 8 tanks were to lead the Gauche Wood attack and 6 the attack on Villers Guislain.

[3] The 29th Lancers was kept in reserve.

[4] Br.-General Gage informed the 5th Cav. Div. at 6.55 a.m. that his brigade would advance from Vaucelette Farm and do the best it could. The division urged him at 8.35 a.m. and again at 9.35 a.m. to "push on" and support the tanks".

[5] See page 238.

Digitized by Google

The day proved fine and dry and, although there was no sun, visibility was fair. About 6.50 a.m., by which time the growing light made it possible for the German machine-gunners to distinguish their targets, Jacob's Horse moved forward, the Jodhpur Lancers being kept back. The infantry at Vaucelette Farm, still held by the composite battalion of the 12th Division, were heartened by the sight of the *sowars* whose further progress, however, was greeted by accurate and heavy machine-gun fire from the vicinity of Chapel Crossing and from posts and shell-holes between the crossing and the beet factory. Efforts to work forward along the railway met with no success. Pinned down by fire the attack of the Lucknow Brigade, made by one dismounted regiment numbering some 230 rifles, soon came to a standstill.

The 4th Cavalry Division (Major-General A. A. Kennedy), which had orders to take advantage of the advance of the tanks to seize Villers Ridge, planned to do so by the advance of the Mhow Brigade (Br.-General N. M. Haig). Mounted action was insisted upon by Lieut.-General Kavanagh. From its assembly position N.N.W. of Peizière the 2nd Lancers was to gallop Targelle Ravine, south of Villers Hill, and its two approaches from the south called Quail Ravine and Pigeon Ravine. A defensive flank facing south and south-east was then to be formed, whilst the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons, skirting Targelle Ravine on the west, rode for Villers Ridge.

The brigade was ready at 6.30 a.m. although the 2nd Lancers, after reaching the rendezvous, had to be given 15 minutes to arm itself with its lances which, in the hurry of moving up, had been left behind and were sent forward in carts. The regiments, drawn up in mass, were suffering casualties from artillery fire, so news of the Lucknow Brigade attack was awaited with some impatience. About 8 a.m. the report of its failure reached Br.-General Haig.[1]

Meanwhile Lieut.-General Kavanagh, commanding the Cavalry Corps, had called Major-General Kennedy to the telephone and asked how his attack was getting on. Major-General Kennedy explained that it had not started because the Lucknow Brigade had made no progress, but the corps

[1] The operation order of the 4th Cav. Div. stated that the G.O.C. Mhow Bde. would arrange to " keep close liaison with the tank attack " ; but this could hardly be done under the circumstances.

Digitized by Google

commander, though made fully aware of the difficulties of the situation, would not tolerate further delay. The divisional commander thereupon gave the necessary order to the Mhow Brigade : he could only hope that the mounted attack would gain some ground and help the Lucknow Brigade forward. Br.-General Haig was convinced that the enterprise was a desperate one and said as much when questioned by a divisional staff officer as to the chances of success. The only artillery support was that afforded by the brigaded R.H.A. batteries of the division and of these one was ordered to change position and did not come into action until 1 p.m.[1] There was no time to make any arrangements with the 55th Division artillery which was shelling Villers Guislain.

At 9.35 a.m. the attack of the Mhow Brigade began. The 2nd Lancers, followed by a squadron of the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons and a section of the 11th Machine-Gun Squadron, left Epéhy, which was under shell-fire, by the southern exit, crossed the railway, and rode down Catelet Valley with the intention of turning northward and gaining Targelle Ravine from the east. Soon the lines of galloping horsemen came under fire from machine guns on either side of the valley and from Kildare Trench, which barred the way in front ;[2] but the charge swept on. Some of the horses jumped the wire which protected Kildare Trench, others burst through gaps ; and it was here that Lieut.-Colonel H. H. F. Turner, commanding the 2nd Lancers, was killed. The Germans fleeing from the trench were pursued by an officer and a few *sowars* who did some execution with sword and lance before drawing rein.[3] The cavalry could go no farther in the face of machine-gun fire from front and flank. Kildare Trench and Kildare Post on the slope of Lark Spur were occupied and some of the horses were huddled into the cover provided by a sunken road in front ; the others were sent back up the valley.[4]

---

[1] Lieut.-Col. H. C. Rochfort-Boyd, commanding the brigade, was wounded later, and one of the battery commanders was killed.

[2] The occupants of one post fled, but came back after the charge had passed.

[3] The officer, Lieut. N. H. Broadway, was shot by a German officer who had made a gesture of surrender. The German was killed by a lance thrust.

[4] Two men of the *418th Regt.* (*183rd Div.*) and three light machine guns were captured. Fifteen Germans were killed by sword or lance, and nearly thirty by rifle or Hotchkiss-gun fire.

Digitized by Google

On the left the Inniskilling squadron in Kildare Post repelled a number of German attacks. An attack from Kildare Lane, a communication trench running along Lark Spur to the left rear of the post, was crushed by a squadron of the Lancers which moved out to meet it. On the other flank, beyond Catelet Copse, were some of the 1/6th King's (165th Brigade) who seized the opportunity to establish a post in the copse.

Rather prematurely, as soon as the 2nd Lancers was known to be on its way, the main body of the Inniskilling Dragoons took the Villers Guislain road out of Peizière. The leading squadron was followed by a section of the 11th Machine-Gun Squadron, with the other two squadrons 600 yards behind in column of squadrons in line of troop columns and a field troop R.E. bringing up the rear. For a thousand yards east of the railway the ground was free of obstacles and provided good going for cavalry ; but, except for the western end of Targelle Ravine, it provided no cover from the cross-fire of the German machine guns. Losing heavily, the leading squadron and the machine-gunners held on their way and reached the neighbourhood of the beet factory where most of the survivors were surrounded. Very few returned. The remaining squadrons and the field troop wheeled about and regained Peizière.[1]

So, in a little more than a quarter of an hour Br.-General Haig saw his worst fears realized. The 2nd Lancers appeared to have been swallowed up within the German lines, but the impression prevailed that the regiment had reached Pigeon Ravine.[2] Accordingly two squadrons of the 38th Central India Horse, remaining regiment of the brigade, were sent forward dismounted as reinforcement, advancing along the southern slope of Lark Spur. The squadrons were soon checked by fire from Limerick Post and a third squadron which tried a more southerly route a little later, could do no better.[3] At 10.50 a.m. arrived a message from the

[1] In this affair the Inniskilling Dragoons lost 6 officers and 108 other ranks. The machine-gun section (2 officers, 53 other ranks, 84 horses, 4 guns) was a total loss.

[2] A report to this effect was despatched by the Mhow Bde. at 10.30 a.m. to the 4th Cav. Div. which transmitted it to the Cavalry Corps at 11.45 a.m.

[3] In order to ascertain whether Kildare Lane was held by the Germans a daring mission was carried out by two mounted *sowars* of the C.I.H. just before noon. They galloped boldly up to the trench, jumped it, and then returned unscathed to report that they had seen in the trench one heavy and several light machine guns fully manned by the enemy.

Digitized by Google

2nd Lancers giving the approximate position of the regiment, and another message, correcting the first, was received by the brigade about an hour later.[1] Communication with the 2nd Lancers was established by lamp signal at 12.45 p.m.

At 11.30 a.m. Br.-General Haig discussed with Br.-General F. G. Lewis commanding the 166th Brigade (55th Division) the possibilities of another attack, for the VII. Corps had urged upon the 55th Division the advisability of making an effort to get the line of posts, Kildare, Limerick, Meath, under cover of the cavalry attack upon Villers Hill.[2] It was therefore arranged that all available men of the 1/5th King's Own, which held the front where it crossed Lark Spur, and such brigade transport details as could be collected, reinforced by the C.I.H., should advance at 1 p.m. starting from 14 Willows Road. It may be said at once that this enterprise was checked soon after the start by a storm of machine-gun fire from front and flanks.[3]

About noon Lieut.-General Kavanagh sent for Major-General Kennedy, commander of the 4th Cavalry Division. He gave him back the Lucknow Brigade and informed him that a fresh attack must be made upon the original objectives by the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions.[4] Major-General Kennedy's order to the 4th Cavalry Division only provided for an attack against the beet factory: by the Lucknow Brigade from the neighbourhood of Vaucelette Farm and by the Mhow Brigade from the south. He planned to move at 2 p.m., but hearing that the 5th Cavalry Division was attacking at 3 p.m., he altered his own time to conform. The objective was to be bombarded by the VII. Corps heavy artillery whilst the R.H.A. brigade engaged the machine-gun posts in the vicinity.

---

[1] These messages were brought by Lance-Dafadar Gobind Singh of the 2nd Lrs., a Rajput, who volunteered for the duty and made three journeys in all under heavy fire; three horses were shot under him. He was awarded the Victoria Cross.

[2] The VII. Corps message was issued on the strength of the original cavalry operation order; but it is remarkable that Br.-General Lewis was not informed by the Mhow Bde. of the capture of Kildare Post. Its capture was known, later, to the 55th Div. which informed the VII. Corps at 2 p.m. Probably the report came from the 1/6th King's (165th Bde.).

[3] Br.-General Lewis was wounded about 3.30 p.m.

[4] Lieut.-General Kavanagh, if not Major-General Kennedy, was under the impression that the 2nd Lancers occupied Pigeon Ravine.

Digitized by Google

Br.-General Haig (Mhow Brigade) reported to the division that he had too few troops in hand for another attack.[1] His message did not arrive until after 3 p.m. at which hour the devoted Jacob's Horse (Lucknow Brigade) began to advance upon the beet factory, following the road from Peizière down which the Inniskilling Dragoons had made their fatal charge. There was little prospect of success in face of the fire of the German machine guns, still unsubdued. The Jodhpur Lancers were sent forward to fill a gap which had developed on the left between Jacob's Horse and the Canadian Brigade, but the gain of ground was negligible.[2]

The 5th Cavalry Division had sent in the Canadian Brigade (Br.-General J. E. B. Seely) dismounted to establish a line between Gauche Wood and Villers Guislain although the village, shelled throughout the day, was not an objective of the afternoon attack. Lord Strathcona's Horse led the way and the south-eastern corner of Gauche Wood, in British hands since the morning attack of the Ambala Brigade and the Guards,[3] was reached without much trouble. To clear the Germans from the vicinity of the railway farther south proved a more difficult task, but about 3.30 p.m. Chapel Crossing was captured. The Fort Garry Horse having provided a welcome reinforcement, a counter-attack from the direction of the beet factory was repulsed about 4.30 p.m., and when darkness fell the Canadians were firmly established beyond the railway north of Vaucelette Farm.[4] The prisoners taken were of the *185th Regiment* (*208th Division*).

It will be seen that these ill-co-ordinated attacks south of Gauche Wood made by the cavalry in small " packets " without the promised tank assistance or adequate artillery support had accomplished little. Although the British did

[1] Casualties of the Inniskilling Dragoons in their charge towards the beet factory have already been given (see page 234). The 2nd Lancers and attached troops lost 5 British and 3 Indian officers and 118 other ranks; the C.I.H. 5 British and one Indian officer and 51 other ranks. In the Mhow Bde. 386 horses were killed and 547, of which 101 were evacuated, were wounded.

[2] The 36th Jacob's Horse lost 2 British and 5 Indian officers and 33 other ranks; the Jodhpur Lancers one British and one Indian officer and 23 other ranks.

[3] See page 238.

[4] The losses of Lord Strathcona's Horse, 3 officers and 50 other ranks, included the commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel M. Docherty, killed; the Fort Garry Horse suffered very little.

Digitized by Google

not know it at the time, the enemy intended no fresh advance in this part of the field; and he had had about eighteen hours in which to consolidate a defensive flank. Relying largely upon a well-organized machine-gun defence, but backed by a fairly powerful artillery, he was not easily to be dispossessed of what he had won.

Peizière and Epéhy had been shelled by the enemy all day, and about 4.30 p.m. he opened a hostile bombardment along the whole front; but no infantry action followed. At 6.30 p.m. the VII. Corps ordered the relief of the 164th and 166th Brigades (55th Division) by the 21st Division[1] which thus took over the front between Malassise Farm and Vaucelette Farm. This relief enabled the Mhow Brigade to go into reserve, the 2nd Lancers coming back in the dark up Catelet Valley with their horses and their wounded. The Lucknow Brigade, and the Canadian Brigade of the 5th Cavalry Division, were relieved by the Sialkot Brigade which the 4th Cavalry Division had kept in reserve all day. The 5th Cavalry Division relieved the Ambala Brigade, in and behind Gauche Wood, with the Secunderabad Brigade.

In the evening Lieut.-General Kavanagh ordered the 1st Cavalry Division, which had been returned to him from the VII. Corps, to provide parties for work on a support line extending southward from the Péronne—Cambrai road in continuation of that being dug behind Gouzeaucourt by the Guards.[2]

Similar instructions were given to the 2nd Cavalry Division which had remained in reserve near Fins (3½ miles S.W. of Gouzeaucourt) all day.

The VII. Corps placed the dismounted battalions of the 3rd Cavalry Division, which had arrived in the corps area, under the 24th Division. Lieut.-General Snow was informed by the Army that he would receive only the artillery of the 9th Division; the infantry was to be kept in Army reserve.

On Revelon Ridge Br.-General Vincent had continued to consolidate his position. He was strengthened by the arrival of 500 Canadian railway troops, but lost the 20th Division details and the 239th Army Troops Company R.E. which were withdrawn without notice. Vincent's Force

[1] The 21st Div. had begun to arrive at Tincourt (6 miles S.W. of Epéhy) at 6.35 a.m.

[2] All three field companies R.E. of the Guards Div. were engaged on this work.

Digitized by Google

constituted a valuable reserve in case of emergency, covering a portion of the British front which was not yet strongly established.

Gauche Wood—Gonnelieu: The Attacks of the Cavalry, the Tanks and the Guards Division

Involved in the operations of the right battalion of the Guards Division, which had the same objective, was the attack delivered against Gauche Wood by the 18th Lancers of the Ambala Brigade (Br.-General C. H. Rankin), 5th Cavalry Division. The Lancers, who faced the western face of the wood, had the support of two batteries of horse artillery. Whilst waiting for the tanks which were to precede this dismounted advance the right of the two leading squadrons came under a galling fire from Chapel Crossing, so it was moved back and ordered to follow the squadron on the left. The tanks did not appear until 7.15 a.m., and after crossing the railway they lost direction in the dim light and ran north toward Gouzeaucourt across the front of the regiment, some of them plunging on to Hodson's Horse which held the left front of the Ambala Brigade. These tanks were followed in their course by the other contingent which should have led the advance of the Lucknow Brigade. The Lancers waited no longer but advanced against Gauche Wood, in which the 2/Grenadier Guards was already at grips with the Germans, whilst the tanks, returning, cruised along the western and southern edges to engage the German machine-guns amongst the trees.

The Guards had attacked at the appointed hour, the 1st Guards Brigade (Br.-General C. R. Champion de Crespigny) advancing from the railway south-east of Gouzeaucourt to secure Gauche Wood—Quentin Mill. The 2/Grenadier Guards on the right deeply impressed the cavalry observers: the battalion had nearly a thousand yards of a bare up-hill slope to traverse, and, instead of proceeding steadily by rushes covered by fire, officers and men covered the whole distance " as fast as their legs could " carry them ". Such tactics were rewarded, for the German machine-gun fire went high and few casualties were suffered until the Grenadiers began to close with the enemy on the northern edge of the wood. Many Germans were shot or bayoneted, and twelve tanks of H Battalion, which should

Digitized by Google

have led the way but were hindered by the difficulties of crossing a sunken road, soon entered the confused fight which raged within the wood. Two counter-attacks from the right were repulsed by the Grenadiers, who captured three field guns after shooting down the Germans as they strove to limber up; but hostile artillery fire knocked out several of the tanks whose crews, with their Lewis guns, joined the infantry.

On the right the 18th Lancers had begun to appear; and, as the Grenadiers had only two subalterns left, the British officers of the Indian cavalry were of great service in directing the clearing of the wood and organizing the defence of its southern and eastern edges.

Meanwhile the surviving tanks went forward to cover the consolidation; but when they tried to advance upon Villers Guislain three were destroyed by shell fire, and none could reach the village. At 1.20 p.m. all tanks still in action were withdrawn.

Gauche Wood was now secure. Reinforcements had arrived in the shape of two dismounted squadrons of the 7th Dragoon Guards (from the Secunderabad Brigade in reserve), the 14th Machine-Gun Squadron, and a company of the 2/Coldstream Guards (support battalion of the 1st Guards Brigade). South of the wood patrols of Lord Strathcona's Horse had secured some prisoners, the total number of Germans captured amounting to several hundred.[1] During an hour's hostile bombardment later in the afternoon Lieut.-Colonel E. C. Corbyn, commanding the 18th Lancers, was killed by a shell.[2]

The attack of the Guards Division (Major-General G. P. T Feilding), made with the 1st Guards Brigade on the right and the 3rd on the left, had for objectives Gauche Wood—Quentin Ridge—Gonnelieu and was supported by two field

[1] Of the *30th, 67th* and *145th Regts.* and the *70th F.A. Regt.* (all *34th Div.*).

According to G.O.A. xiii the *34th Div.* was pushed back by cavalry, tanks and the Guards, being unprotected on both flanks (the *9th Bav. Res. Div.* came into action on the northern flank later). The German artillery had not brought up across the canal sufficient ammunition to give effective assistance.

[2] The 18th Lancers lost 4 British officers and 37 Indian other ranks; the 2/Grenadier Guards 8 officers and 151 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

artillery brigades.[1] As for heavy artillery, there was little left at the disposal of the III. Corps,[2] and most of the surviving batteries were engaged farther north.

Every effort had been made to provide tank assistance[3] and every one of the 20 assembled by H Battalion came into action: twelve, as we have seen, with the 2/Grenadier Guards; four with the 3/Coldstream Guards, next on the left; and four which were lent to the 3rd Guards Brigade. Without them this brigade would have had no tanks at all, for touch was lost before the action with the E Battalion contingent, and lack of petrol prevented the D Battalion company from taking part.

The attack of the 1st Guards Brigade was a complete success. How the Grenadiers, on the right, captured Gauche Wood has already been related. On the left of this battalion the 3/Coldstream Guards carried the crest of Quentin Ridge as far as the mill. The four tanks, said to have been "invaluable," were in the forefront; and after three had received direct hits and the fourth had become ditched, the crews joined the Coldstream to assist in establishing the position. About 11 a.m. a company of the 1/Irish Guards (in brigade reserve) arrived to strengthen the left flank. The casualties of the Coldstream[4] were chiefly from machine-gun fire.

The 3rd Guards Brigade (Br.-General Lord Henry Seymour) had the task of capturing that portion of Quentin Ridge north of the mill, and the village of Gonnelieu. On the right, the 1/Welsh Guards was to have the help of the section of tanks lent from H Battalion, but in the dark the tanks failed to get into touch. The Welsh Guards did not delay their attack on that account. On approaching the crest of the ridge, however, the two leading companies came under a terrific fire from the German machine guns in the old

[1] The LXX. Bde. R.F.A. (15th Div.) which on 30th Nov. was moving through the Third Army area and the 235th Bde. R.F.A. (47th Div.). Both brigades of the 47th Div. had been at Bus (4 miles W. of Metz) whilst some of their guns were calibrated; the other brigade (236th) was sent to the 20th Div.

[2] Of 29 siege and heavy batteries which had been in action on 29th Nov. the equivalent of ten remained.

[3] The allotment was:
1st Gds. Bde.: 20 tanks (H Bn. II. Bde.)
3rd Gds. Bde.: 20 tanks (D Bn. I. Bde.)
17 tanks (E Bn. I. Bde.)

[4] Five officers and 121 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

British trench called Green Switch ; two-thirds of the men were hit and the survivors took what cover they could. One solitary tank of the missing section[1] now arrived to restore the fortunes of the day. Protected by the lie of the ground from direct gun-fire, the machine with all her Lewis guns in action, lumbered along Green Switch, this onslaught so demoralizing the German infantry and machine-gunners that they began to surrender. The Welsh Guards seized the opportunity to rush forward and collect the prisoners ;[2] without further trouble the battalion, though sadly diminished in numbers,[3] was able to dig in beyond the crest of the ridge.

The 4/Grenadier Guards, whose objective was Gonnelieu, attacked without tanks, and no British shells appeared to be falling on the village which was packed with men and machine guns. In its advance the battalion passed through the 6/Oxford & Bucks L.I. (60th Brigade), which had maintained its position astride the Gouzeaucourt—Gonnelieu road since the abortive night attack,[4] and the two companies of the 5/Northamptonshire (pioneers of the 12th Division), in Green Switch which they had occupied when the Germans attacked Gonnelieu on the previous morning.[5] The right company of the Grenadiers inclined rather too far to the right and its advance was slowed down by machine-gun fire coming from the Germans in front of the Welsh Guards ; the left company fought its way into Gonnelieu and took some prisoners, but was involved in a struggle with greatly superior numbers. More and more Germans entered the village, for the enemy was about to resume his offensive, and the survivors of the Grenadiers were forced out. They rallied upon their support and reserve companies in Green Switch. Capt. G. H. T. Paton, commanding the support company, steadied the troops farther to the left where few officers had survived the enemy fire ; displaying the utmost

[1] On the way forward one tank had broken a track ; another had become ditched ; and a third had received a direct hit.

[2] About 300 Germans were captured, mainly of the *14th Bav. Res. Regt.* (which formed the left of the *9th Bav. Res. Div.*) and of the *4th Assault Bn.* Twenty-six machine guns were taken.

[3] The 1/Welsh Guards lost 9 officers and 270 other ranks.

[4] See page 226.

[5] See page 193.

Digitized by Google

indifference to machine-gun bullets he urged on a number of counter-attacks until he fell mortally wounded.[1]

As the right of the battalion had linked up with the Welsh Guards the line of the whole brigade now seemed fairly secure. Attempts of the enemy to advance from Gonnelieu were repulsed, and beyond the left flank the German attacks had made no great impression. In this quarter, as will presently be related, the advance of the 1/Grenadier Guards had done much to restore the situation.

If the Guards had failed to capture Gonnelieu they had secured their other objectives, and, by anticipating it, had stopped the attack of two German divisions and part of another.[2] At night the 1/Guards Brigade on the right was relieved by the 2nd; but, although the front battalions of the 3/Guards Brigade now mustered only a few hundred rifles between them,[3] they remained in the line for another twenty-four hours.

The German Attacks: Gonnelieu-la Vacquerie Evacuation of Masnières

Facing the north-western edge of Gonnelieu the 12/Rifle Brigade (60th Brigade) found itself on the left flank of the Guards' attack. At 8.30 a.m.[4] the German attack which forced the 4/Grenadier Guards out of Gonnelieu struck the Rifle Brigade and also the 12/K.R.R.C. which, farther to the left beyond the old British front line, continued the defensive front to la Vacquerie. The two battalions, although very tired and weak in numbers, resisted stoutly, and the Germans suffered severe losses from the fire of rifles, Lewis guns and machine guns; but the weight of numbers told, and, after several attempts, parties of the enemy reached and occupied

[1] His cool and courageous example was of the utmost value, and he received the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

[2] *34th Div.* whose objective was Gouzeaucourt, *9th Bav. Res. Div.*, and the left of the *185th Div.*, the first objective of both these divisions being Villers Plouich. Prisoners of all three regiments of Bavarians were taken in Gonnelieu which was congested with troops, including some of the *28th Div.*, in line on the right of the *185th Div.*

[3] The casualties of the 4/Grenadier Gds., 10 officers and 195 other ranks, included the commanding officer, Viscount Gort, severely wounded.

[4] The *Second Army* had named 9.30 a.m. as zero hour (8.30 by British time) so the attack was put in as soon as possible after the British entered Gonnelieu.

Digitized by Google

a communication trench behind the old British front line.[1] To the south-west the 12/Rifle Brigade presented a refused flank; on the north-east the 12 K.R.R.C. did likewise; and the position was restored by three companies of the 1/Grenadier Guards (3rd Guards Brigade) which counter-attacked eastward with their right on Flag Ravine, and drove the Germans back over the main road, taking more than one hundred prisoners.[2] During the afternoon arrangements were made to relieve the gallant remnants of the 12/Rifle Brigade whose position was then included in the front of the Guards Division.

In front of la Vacquerie the enemy had even less success although, after a heavy bombardment, he attacked with great determination, bombers, covered by machine-gun fire, advancing along the front of the old German outpost zone in which the village was included. All ground lost was recovered by counter-attack after some hand-to-hand fighting.[3] The 12/K.R.R.C. held steadfastly to its positions under continuous shell fire until after darkness fell when the 183rd Brigade (61st Division) began to take over the front.

Next on the left the troops of the 12th Division,[4] and of the 59th and 61st Brigades (20th Division) beyond, were not heavily engaged. In the sector of the 36th Brigade, where the 9/Royal Fusiliers was holding the old Hindenburg front system south of the Péronne—Cambrai road, German bombing attacks were beaten off until the British supply of bombs was exhausted. A withdrawal across the road was then carried out.[5] At night the relief carried out by the 183rd Brigade extended to the front east of la Vacquerie, leaving in the line only the left (61st) brigade of the 20th Division. In taking over from the tired and widely extended

[1] The *185th Div.* which had been pushed up to form the left of the Caudry Group seems to have taken little part. Only one of its regiments (*161st*) occupied an attack frontage, for in its advance the *109th Grenadiers* (*28th Div.*) had its right on the old British front line. British Intelligence had no knowledge of the arrival of the *185th Div.* until next day.

[2] The 1/Grenadier Gds. lost 2 officers and 117 other ranks.

[3] The *110th Grenadiers*, in the centre of the *28th Div.*, attacked here. The frontage of the regiment extended to Sonnet Farm.

[4] Under command of the 20th Div. At 9.50 a.m. the III. Corps reorganized the front, giving Gauche Wood—Gonnelieu (both inclusive) to the Guards Div., and Gonnelieu (exclusive)—Welsh Ridge to the 20th Div.

[5] These attacks were made by the *40th Fusiliers*, forming the right of the *28th Div.* "Fus. Regt. No. 40" states that the *220th Div.* on its right made no preparation to attack.

Digitized by Google

troops of the 12th and 20th Divisions who had borne the brunt of the fighting for two whole days, the newcomers at some points occupied a line in rear of the foremost positions, particularly on the left where none of the forward troops could be discovered.

The troops of the 29th Division in their very vulnerable salient east of Marcoing had every reason to expect fresh attacks.[1] The 88th Brigade[2] (Br.-General H. Nelson), however, passed a "quiet" day except for some sniping activity and occasional bursts of machine gun fire; in the centre of the defensive flank between Welsh Ridge and les Rues Vertes the 4/Worcestershire was able to improve its position. Holding the bend of the canal the 87th Brigade (Br.-General C. H. T. Lucas), although shelled at times, was likewise left almost undisturbed. It was Br.-General G. R. H. Cheape's 86th Brigade which took the shock of the renewed German onslaught.

At 7.15 a.m. the hostile artillery opened upon Masnières and les Rues Vertes; an hour later, under an intense barrage, waves of infantry advanced along the south side of the canal against les Rues Vertes.[3] This movement was checked with heavy loss by the fire of all arms; from a position near the sugar factory four machine-guns which fired in enfilade provided the German stretcher-bearers with work for the rest of the day. North of the canal the 16/Middlesex, on the right, repulsed by fire the advance of strong patrols.

At 9.50 a.m. Br.-General Lucas, who had been placed in command of all forward troops, reported to Major-General de Lisle[4] that the 86th Brigade must be reinforced; otherwise it might be necessary to evacuate Masnières. In another message, at 11.30 a.m.[5] Br.-General Lucas gave the location of all units in detail showing how urgent was the need for fresh troops; and at 1 p.m. he reported that Masnières must be abandoned if no reinforcements arrived that night. A reply was despatched at 3.30 p.m. All the combatant troops of the 29th Division, except the pioneer

[1] See Sketch 17.

[2] The 1/K.O.S.B. and 2/S.W.B. (both from the 87th Bde.) were with the 88th Bde.

[3] The *105th* and *143rd Regts.* of the *30th Div.*

[4] Divisional headquarters, at Villers Plouich, were shelled out at 9.55 a.m. and moved to Trescault, over 4 miles S.W. of Marcoing. Communications were frequently cut by the German bombardments during the day

[5] Not received by divisional headquarters until 3.30 p.m.

Digitized by Google

battalion and one field company R.E., had already been absorbed into the salient, so Major-General de Lisle could himself provide little relief or reinforcement. Having seen General Byng, who was " most anxious to give up no ground" although he could provide no assistance, Major-General de Lisle now left the decision to the brigade commanders: if they considered that Masnières could not be held the 86th Brigade must be taken out of the line, the 87th and 88th Brigades turning back their flanks on either side of the canal. This message did not reach the 86th Brigade until nearly seven o'clock.

Meanwhile, at 2.30 p.m., a furious bombardment opened on Masnières and les Rues Vertes, enveloping the whole area in a pall of dust and smoke. An hour and a quarter later the fire lifted from the houses south of the canal and the enemy began to creep forward into the ruins, working northward towards the canal crossings. The defenders of les Rues Vertes now consisted mainly of new drafts which had been thrust into the fight before they could join their regiments; these men were much shaken and were firing wildly as they fell back, but they soon responded to the call of the brigade commander who organized a defence, consisting of posts and barricades facing south, to cover the canal crossings. Bombing parties were formed to drive the Germans out of les Rues Vertes, and most of the village was retaken, together with 80 prisoners.[1]

By 7 p.m. the fighting had died down and preparations for the withdrawal began. The first move was at 11 p.m., and the whole operation was so ably conducted that it entirely escaped detection by the enemy. Lewis-gun posts at the bridge-heads covered the withdrawal to the northern bank of the troops south of the canal; when these were clear the 2/Royal Fusiliers, support battalion, vacated its widespread posts in Masnières; then the 16/Middlesex followed from the right sector; and last to leave its position was the 1/Lancashire Fusiliers on the left, the whole brigade withdrawing by the northern bank. All wounded were evacuated. Every cellar was searched. The last two battalions to leave loaded up every man with 170 rounds of S.A.A. and two bombs, and threw the remaining ammunition into the canal. By 4 a.m. on the 2nd December the

[1] Captain W. K. Innes, the acting brigade-major, and his orderly killed four Germans and captured five.

Digitized by Google

withdrawal was complete and the 86th Brigade was on its way to a much deserved rest in Ribécourt.

The 87th Brigade had swung back its right to cover the lock, two companies of the 1/2nd Monmouthshire (Pioneers), which had marched up from Sorel, taking over the extreme right next to the canal. On the opposite bank the 88th Brigade had thrown back its left to conform. The artillery commander[1] judged it prudent to withdraw three forward batteries in action south of Marcoing to positions half-way between Marcoing and Ribécourt.

On the front of the 6th Division, left sector of the III. Corps, the enemy made an attempt to advance on Cantaing from la Folie Wood[2] about 1.45 p.m., after the village had been bombarded for nearly two hours. The fire of the forward companies and of a section of machine guns " in " ambush ", with some help from the IV. Corps, sufficed to drive the Germans back.

The Bourlon—Moeuvres Front

During the day IV. Corps headquarters were relieved by those of the V. Corps,[3] command passing from General Woollcombe to General Fanshawe at 6 p.m. On the Bourlon—Moeuvres front hostile shelling was lighter. The 59th Division, holding the right sector of the corps, assisted by its fire to repulse the German movement against Cantaing but was not itself attacked.[4] Neither was the 47th Division in the centre, nor the 99th Brigade of the 2nd Division next

---

[1] The field artillery covering the 29th Div. on this day consisted of 17 guns and six howitzers of the XVII. Bde. R.F.A. and 11 guns of the 232nd Army Bde. R.F.A.

[2] See Sketch 15.

[3] Commander : Lt.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe.
B.G.G.S. : Br.-General G. F. Boyd.
D.A. & Q.M.G. : Br.-General H. M. de F. Montgomery.
C.R.A. : Br.-General R. P. Benson.
C.H.A. : Br.-General A. M. Tyler.
C.E. : Br.-General A. J. Craven.
The strength of its artillery on this day amounted to 19 horse and field brigades and 33 siege and heavy batteries.

[4] The heavy gas casualties suffered by the 2/6th N. Staffordshire, 2/6th S. Staffordshire and the T.M. Bty. 176 Bde. in Bourlon Wood during the night necessitated the immediate relief of these units.

Digitized by Google

on the left; but astride the Canal du Nord the fighting, which had never died down completely during the night, continued all day.

East of the canal the 6th Brigade (Br.-General R. K. Walsh) held its front with the survivors of the 13/Essex, whilst the 1/Kings was responsible for the defence of the western side; but there was a considerable mixture of units. At 8 a.m. strong bombing attacks enabled the Germans to force their way along the old Hindenburg front system until they were actually in rear of the headquarters of the 1/King's. Counter-attacks, principally by men of the 17/Middlesex, restored the situation and it was in this fighting that Captain McReady-Diarmid was killed.[1] At 11 a.m. the King's were again attacked, but after some anxious moments the enemy was driven off by Lewis gun and Stokes mortar fire which did considerable execution. Two companies of the 2/H.L.I. (from the 5th Brigade) helped to repulse another attack delivered about 3.30 p.m. The Essex, on the eastern side of the canal had checked by fire a number of attacks, the enemy striving to break in by forcing his way along Canal Trench. At 5 p.m. the front of the brigade was reported to be intact. The 2/H.L.I. then began to take over all forward positions west of the canal, a difficult operation as portions of no less than five units were under command of the King's. The 22/Royal Fusiliers (from the 99th Brigade) relieved the Essex on the right. Fighting continued at intervals, for the German bombing parties were never inactive for long.[2]

The 56th Division (VI. Corps), on the left of the 2nd Division had relieved its exhausted battalions during the night. No infantry attacks developed, but a heavy hostile bombardment in the afternoon caused some loss, and did considerable damage to the trenches. The 51st Division, which had been brought back to Bapaume on the previous night and was now transferred to the VI. Corps, began to relieve the 56th after darkness had fallen, but the taking over of the front positions was deferred for another 24 hours.

---

[1] See page 218.

[2] Prisoners of the *225th Res. Regt.* (*49th Res. Div.*) were taken on this day.

Digitized by Google

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 1ST DECEMBER[1]

Rupprecht received no news until 8 p.m., and so concluded that no success worth mentioning had been gained. Marwitz, commanding the *Second Army*, admitted that the attack had " run itself out ", but Rupprecht urged that if Trescault could not be reached la Vacquerie, at least, must be captured. His idea—a somewhat ambitious one—was to secure a line east of the railway Marcoing—Villers Guislain, clear Bourlon Wood, and push through Cantaing and Noyelles in order to lessen the German salient which had been created.[2]

The Busigny Group exaggerated the power and tank strength of the British counter-attacks and stated that another cause of failure was the lack of ammunition, especially in the artillery: the horses of the ammunition columns were exhausted after forty-eight hours' continuous work, and the congestion of traffic on the roads continued. Actually the congestion of the front about Gonnelieu, where the confusion of units was so great and the *9th Bavarian Reserve Division* is said to have behaved badly, was another important factor. The Caudry Group expressed frank disappointment that la Vacquerie remained in British hands, whilst " Masnières, Marcoing and Noyelles were stoutly held by " the enemy in spite of the heaviest fire."

Moser admits that the divisions of the Arras Group were too tired to achieve anything of importance, the *214th* and the *3rd Guard Division* being exhausted.

Orders for the morrow called a halt: the day was to be devoted to consolidation, the forward positions being organized as an outpost zone. The Caudry Group, however, required the *30th Division* to capture Masnières (evacuated by the 86th Brigade during the night of the 1st/2nd) by an early hour on the 3rd December, when the *28th Division* supported by an advance of the *220th* and *9th Reserve Divisions* on its right, was to storm la Vacquerie.

---

[1] Principally from Rupprecht, Moser, German regimental histories, and information supplied by the *Reichsarchiv* and the *Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres.*

[2] See Sketches 14 and 15.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917
(continued)

2ND–4TH DECEMBER

THE LOSS OF LA VACQUERIE AND WITHDRAWAL TO MARCOING: END OF THE GERMAN COUNTER-STROKE

(Sketches 15, 17, 18, 19)

No incident of importance occurred during the night of the 1st/2nd December. A little rain fell, but a period of cold frosty weather was setting in, with sun at intervals and fair visibility. The 2nd December also provided something of a respite for the British, as the enemy was not yet ready to renew his operations except upon a small scale. Sharp fighting did, indeed, take place near la Vacquerie, but the Germans made no great effort at Marcoing. In the vicinity of the Canal du Nord (left of the V. Corps) they were, however, more persistent.

The 61st (S. Midland) Division (Major-General C. J. Mackenzie), moved to the III. Corps front without its artillery, had begun to take over the line covering la Vacquerie.[1] The newcomers found the position difficult to organize effectively against an aggressive enemy. After the 183rd Brigade (Br.-General A. H. Spooner) had relieved the troops of the 12th and 20th Divisions the British line facing the Péronne—Cambrai road was far too close to la Vacquerie to permit of an effective defence of the village,[2] whilst an awkward salient existed farther east where the trenches of the old Hindenburg front system ran into the defence line. It was at this salient that the Germans renewed their attacks.

At 5.30 a.m. a bombing assault won a little more of the Hindenburg trenches for the enemy, despite the efforts of the 2/6th Gloucestershire to keep him out. Next on the left the 2/8th Worcestershire repulsed an attack. An enemy

[1] See Sketch 18.

[2] This was realized by the III. Corps which instructed the 61st Division to push forward towards the road, if possible.

9A—23639

Digitized by Google

advance over the open, made half an hour later, was driven off by fire, and at 6.30 a.m. another effort in greater force met with no better success and cost the Germans dear. In the afternoon the bombardment of la Vacquerie, and of the whole brigade line, became intense. At 3 p.m. the enemy came on in considerable numbers east and south-east of the village, and, although the advance over the open was everywhere checked and driven back by fire, the bombing attacks at the salient drove in the 2/6th Gloucestershire, leaving 500 yards of the Hindenburg front system in German hands.[1] The British line was thus forced back almost to the eastern outskirts of la Vacquerie.[2]

At night the 182nd Brigade (Br.-General W. K. Evans) relieved the remnants of the 61st Brigade (20th Division) which were holding the line farther along the slopes of Welsh Ridge. This proved another difficult operation, for the troops of the 61st Brigade were disposed in small posts to cover the front and in the darkness proved hard to find. On the left touch was obtained with the defensive flank of the 29th Division.

Farther north still, the position of the troops of the 29th Division beyond the St. Quentin canal[3] continued to give cause for anxiety. As a precaution the 16th Brigade (Br.-General H. A. Walker) of Major-General T. O. Marden's 6th Division had been brought back from the Gonnelieu front on the night of the 1st/2nd December and placed in position on Highland Ridge. Later, at 10 a.m. the III. Corps ordered all bridges over the canal to be prepared for demolition. The enemy, however, had been slow to follow up the retirement of the 86th Brigade from Masnières[4] which he had only entered after subjecting the shattered, empty village to a severe bombardment. At 8.30 a.m .an attack delivered against the troops of the 87th Brigade (Br.-General C. H. T. Lucas) in the bend of the canal was repulsed by fire without much difficulty. Thereafter the Germans were content to

[1] The headquarters of the Gloucestershire were over-run, the commanding officer, Major W. L. Ruthven, being reported wounded and missing.

[2] Elements of the *99th Res.* and *190th Regts.* (left of the *220th Div.*) took part in this fighting. The enemy's objective was not la Vacquerie on this day: he was striving to improve his front positions in readiness for the attack on the morrow.

[3] See Sketch 17.

[4] See page 245.

Digitized by Google

bombard the British positions, directing trench-mortar fire upon the forward posts and trenches. At night the two battalions of the 87th Brigade were relieved by two of the 16th Brigade (6th Division),[1] Major-General Marden eventually becoming responsible for the whole front, including that portion south of the canal held by the 88th Brigade.

The V. Corps heavy artillery opened at 10 a.m. upon a concentration of enemy troops in the area between Bourlon Wood and the Canal du Nord.[2] The wood was shelled by the enemy throughout the afternoon. Shortly before 4.30 p.m. a hostile barrage came down along the whole front of the 2nd Division; twenty minutes later the 2/Highland L.I., which held what was now the 5th Brigade sector west of the canal, was heavily attacked. Stokes mortar and Lewis-gun fire checked the Germans whose discomfiture, for the most part, was completed by the British artillery; but at one point near the canal a party of the enemy entered the H.L.I. position and had to be ejected by counter-attack. On the eastern bank of the canal the 22/Royal Fusiliers (99th Brigade) repulsed an assault which was delivered along both sides of Canal Trench, Lewis gun fire defeating the German bombers.

At 8.10 p.m. the 47th Division recovered the position, on the ridge west of Bourlon Wood, which it had lost in the German attack of the 30th November. This successful operation was undertaken by order of the corps, for possession of the crest afforded the enemy good observation southward. Two companies of the 1/7th and two of the 1/8th London (both 140th Brigade) were chiefly concerned, whilst the right of the 2nd Division (23/Royal Fusiliers, 99th Brigade) was enabled to gain a little ground. The Germans appeared to be taken by surprise but, even so, the 1/7th London suffered rather heavily from machine-gun fire. Some fifty prisoners[3] and 16 machine guns were taken.

In the VI. Corps the 51st (Highland) Division completed the relief of the 56th (London) Division when night fell.

South of Gauche Wood on the fronts of the Cavalry Corps and the VII. Corps, the right of the Third Army, little of moment occurred. Behind Lieut.-General Snow's right the

[1] 14/D.L.I. (attached from 18th Bde.) and 1/K. Shropshire L.I.

[2] See Sketch 15.

[3] Mainly of the *221st Div.*

Digitized by Google

French artillery began to come into action, and by evening he had received five British batteries of 6-inch howitzers which were very welcome. Corps orders were issued for strengthening the defences of Ronssoy, Epéhy and Peizière.

After another uneventful night the 3rd December saw both the renewal and the end of the German counter-stroke.[1] The hostile attacks, though heavy, were restricted to narrow fronts, la Vacquerie and Welsh Ridge being the scene of some of the fiercest fighting of the day.

At 7.30 a.m. the 183rd Brigade (61st Division) endeavoured to recover, at the salient east of la Vacquerie,[2] the trenches lost on the previous afternoon : the attack, which was made by two companies of the 2/5th Warwickshire (attached from the 182nd Brigade), had no success. Soon afterwards an intense bombardment opened upon la Vacquerie and the neighbouring British positions. At 8.25 a.m. German infantry advanced in waves over the open whilst bombing parties attacked up the trenches. British artillery,[3] machine-gun and small-arms fire did great execution amongst the enemy above ground, but his bombers made headway. The German onset by way of Barrier Trench and Village Lane proved too much for the 2/4th Gloucestershire which was forced out of la Vacquerie, whilst the 2/6th Gloucestershire, next on the left, was also compelled to withdraw. Corner Work, just beyond the north-west edge of the village remained in British possession : it was held by parties of the two Gloucestershire battalions and the reserve of the 2/8th Worcestershire, with some of the 2/5th Warwickshire extending the line northward. At night the 184th Brigade, in reserve, sent up the 2/4th R. Berkshire to take over Corner Work.[4]

[1] The British official title is " The German Counter-Attacks, 30th Nov.—" 3rd Dec." as part of " The Cambrai Operations 20th Nov.—7th Dec." " Schlachten und Gefechte " allots for the " Angriffschlacht bei Cambrai " the period 30th Nov.—7th Dec. which includes the completion of the British withdrawal to the Flesquières line.

[2] See Sketch 18.

[3] Br.-Gen. H. W. A. Christie, C.R.A. 20th Div. still commanded the field artillery which now consisted of the LXII. and LXIII. Bdes. (12th Div.), XCI. Bde. (20th Div.), 236th Bde. (47th Div.), and a battery of the 179th Army Bde. The 150th Army Bde. arrived late on the 3rd Dec.

[4] The *II/40th Fusiliers* and *III/110th Grenadiers* (*28th Div.*) had led the attack upon la Vacquerie. Previous to this action the *185th Div.* had extended its right to a point almost due south of the village.

Digitized by Google

In the 182nd Brigade the 2/7th Warwickshire fought hard all day to maintain its front which was in a sunken road beyond the old Hindenburg front system, here known as Emden Support and Emden Trench. On its extreme left the battalion repulsed many bombing attacks made along the communication trench called Ostrich Avenue. The right of the Warwickshire, however, came under machine-gun fire from its right rear after la Vacquerie was taken, and when darkness fell the 2/7th held nothing below la Vacquerie—Masnières road except a portion of Emden Support.

During the night readjustments of the line were made without interference from the enemy who was engaged upon a similar task.[1]

At 10.30 a.m. on the 3rd December the Germans put down a heavy barrage upon the 88th Brigade, south of the St. Quentin canal,[2] and upon the 16th Brigade in the bend of the canal beyond Marcoing.[3] Hostile infantry then advanced to the attack. The left of the 88th Brigade, Newfoundland Battalion and 2/S. Wales Borderers (attached from the 87th Brigade), had suffered severely, some of the troops having been blown out of their posts by trench-mortar bombardment; but the Germans coming forward along the south bank of the canal were checked by fire when they reached the foremost British positions.

Meanwhile, heavy fighting raged in the bend of the canal. The first attack was repulsed by the rifle and Lewis-gun fire of the 14/Durham L.I. and the 1/K. Shropshire L.I., except near the canal where the right company of the D.L.I. was driven from a shallow and uncompleted trench. The trench was promptly regained by a counter-attack led by Captain A. M. Lascelles, who had already been wounded. A like result attended the next German effort, the right of

[1] According to " Regt. No. 65 " that regiment relieved the troops of the *110th Grenadiers* and *40th Fusiliers* in la Vacquerie, the *II/65th* on the right linking up with the *19th Res.* (*9th Res. Div.*). Thus it appears that with the extension of the fronts of the *185th Div.*, to the right, and the *9th Res. Div.*, to the left, the *28th* and *220th Divs.* were drawn back into reserve. Although some such relief was suspected by British Intelligence nothing definite was known at the time. The Bavarian Official Account states that the *9th Bav. Res. Div.* took over the front of the " completely " exhausted " *34th Div.* between Gonnelieu and Villers Guislain, so the congestion of German formations existed no longer in this part of the field.

[2] See Sketch 17.

[3] The shelling extended to the back areas; it was so heavy at Ribécourt that the 86th Bde. was withdrawn to the vicinity of Trescault.

Digitized by Google

the D.L.I. again giving ground and recovering it by counter-attack ; but the Germans were now left in possession of the lock house, and when they put in a third attack at 12.15 p.m. a close, confused struggle ensued, Captain Lascelles, who was captured, escaping to rally and encourage his men.[1] The Germans, in much superior force, pressed on regardless of loss, penetrating both flanks of the D.L.I. and also the left of the Shropshire who, so far, had maintained their position intact The fight continued with rifle, Lewis gun, bomb and bayonet as the remnants of the two battalions fought their way back across the canal, the K.S.L.I. passing through Marcoing to rally in the Hindenburg support system. It seemed that the Germans were fought to a stand-still, for they made no attempt to follow up and enter the village. The D.L.I., though sadly reduced in numbers,[2] were reorganized by their energetic commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel J. B. Rosher, and eventually recrossed the canal by the railway bridge and a barge bridge near it. They regained the reserve line of the old position, two companies of the 8/Bedfordshire (support battalion of the 16th Brigade) coming up on their left. In gaining these trenches a number of Germans were killed and a few taken prisoner.[3]

Early in the afternoon alarming reports began to reach 6th Division headquarters in Havrincourt Wood : the Germans were said to have broken through and to be entering Marcoing. Anxiety, too, was felt for the left of the 88th Brigade, south of the canal, where the 2/S. Wales Borderers and the Newfoundlanders had suffered so grievously ; but here the 2/Hampshire had taken over the line. Major-General Marden sent up a battalion of the 16th Brigade to reinforce the left of the 88th ; manned the Hindenburg support system on the forward slope of Highland Ridge with the reserves immediately available ; ordered the 71st Brigade, holding the Noyelles sector, to establish a line along the southern edge of Noyelles and Nine Wood facing Marcoing ; and set two battalions, one from the 71st Brigade and one from the 18th Brigade in the Cantaing

[1] Thrice wounded, his gallant leadership at this critical period was invaluable ; he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

[2] The 14/D.L.I. lost 14 officers and 262 other ranks on this day out of a fighting strength of 450.

[3] Of the *227th Res. Regt.* (*107th Div.*).

Digitized by Google

sector, to dig in on the Premy Chapel—Flesquières ridge. All field batteries in position east of the Hindenburg support system were ordered to withdraw west of it.[1]

Major-General Marden knew that Br.-General Walker, whose 16th Brigade had taken over the trenches in the bend of the canal on the previous night, considered that the position was untenable in the face of a serious attack, and he represented this view to the III. Corps. He was told that a general withdrawal to the Hindenburg support system would shortly take place; but a withdrawal and readjustment of the Marcoing position was carried out by divisional order without delay. All troops were brought back across the St. Quentin canal and, at an early hour on the morning of the 4th, the bridges were blown.[2] On the right the 88th Brigade swung back so that its line ran almost due north down the slope of Welsh Ridge to join the main position of the 16th Brigade which extended along the near bank of the river Schelde in and through Marcoing, all river bridges having been prepared for demolition. Forward posts covered the old crossings of the St. Quentin canal, the detachment on the left, at Chateau Talma, being in touch with troops of the 71st Brigade which still defended the Noyelles sector. Here, too, the British operations were completed without interruption from the enemy.

As regards the remainder of the battle-front on this day, German artillery fire was heavy at intervals upon certain localities. The VII. Corps discharged 585 gas projectors in the Bellicourt area as a precaution against a possible attack. At noon the V. Corps extended its left to include the front of the 51st Division which at night relieved the left sector of the 5th Brigade (2nd Division) west of the Canal du Nord. Spasmodic bomb fighting had continued in these trenches, but the 2/H.L.I. managed to reduce the enemy to comparative inactivity before the relief was carried out.

The 25th Division, from the First Army, began to detrain in the Bapaume (VI. Corps) area. With the 9th Division, transferred from the VII. Corps, now available for the relief

[1] The field artillery covering the 6th Div. front consisted of the XVII. Bde. (29th Div.), V. A.H.A. Bde. and 232nd A.F.A. Bde.

[2] Five bridges were blown by a demolition party of the 455th (W. Riding) Field Coy. R.E. (29th Div.) using explosive captured in Marcoing from the Germans; the electric leads had been cut so often by shell-fire that safety fuze was employed in most cases. The 509th (London) Field Coy. R.E. (6th Div.) blew up a large ammunition dump.

Digitized by Google

of the Guards, the III. Corps planned another reorganization of its front.

During the night of the 3rd/4th December Vincent's Force was at last broken up, its positions being taken over by the 64th Brigade (21st Division); but 500 rifles of Vincent's were, for the time being, kept as reserve about Revelon Farm at the disposal of the Cavalry Corps.

On the 4th December the Commander-in-Chief visited General Byng again, and made a round of the various corps headquarters in order to obtain a clearer impression of the events of the 30th November, the first day of the German counter-stroke. It was anticipated that the enemy might renew his attacks upon the morrow, and the Army sent the 16th (Irish) Division, coming from the VI. Corps front astride the Scarpe, to reinforce the VII. Corps where, behind the British right, the French XIV. Corps still stood at call. The III. Corps received the 36th (Ulster) Division, whose departure from the Third Army had been delayed as Lieut.-General Pulteney was still in need of fresh troops.[1]

On this day the only fighting of importance occurred upon the front of the III. Corps. Having captured la Vacquerie [2] the enemy was now concerned to improve his position on the slopes of Welsh Ridge and consequently the 182nd Brigade of the 61st Division bore the brunt. The brigade had the 2/6th Warwickshire on the right, east of Corner Work, with the 2/7th astride the Hindenburg front system on the higher slopes of Welsh Ridge above la Vacquerie—Masnières road, its left still in possession of Ostrich Avenue. Farther to the left the position of the 2/8th Warwickshire was unchanged.

The Germans attacked about 8.30 a.m. after a vigorous bombardment, and fighting for Ostrich Avenue continued all day. Although the enemy gained ground at times he was always thrust back by counter-attacks in which the 2/8th Warwickshire lent valuable aid. On the other flank of the sorely tried 2/7th the German bombers strove throughout the afternoon to advance up the Hindenburg front system, and here the 2/6th Warwickshire helped to keep them at

[1] The troops of the 36th Div. were only "fresh" in the sense that they had been out of the battle for about a week. They were badly in need of more rest.

[2] See Sketch 18.

Digitized by Google

bay. A day of hard fighting with heavy losses on both sides left the position of the 182nd Brigade intact.

At 11 p.m. two companies of the 2/4th R. Berkshire in Corner Work attempted to clear the trenches leading into la Vacquerie, but all that was won was lost again by hostile counter-attack.

The Decision to Withdraw to the Flesquières Line

On the 2nd December, Sir Douglas Haig had discussed with Lieut.-General Kiggell, his Chief of the General Staff, the question of a withdrawal from the Marcoing—Bourlon salient which was, indeed, a considerable liability rather than an asset, now that the Third Army was thrown upon the defensive. Fresh German attacks were expected, and the divisions which were arriving to relieve the tired troops holding the British front were themselves in need of rest and reinforcement, having borne their share of the arduous fighting in which the British Armies on the Western Front had been engaged throughout 1917. With their hard-earned sojourn in reserve areas cut short, they came to the Cambrai front to replace others who were in still greater need of a respite ; and the prospect which confronted them, under winter conditions was not an attractive one. The changing fortunes of the battle had left the British defences and forward areas in such a state that all arms and services were called to unremitting toil.

The Commander-in-Chief, however, took a longer view : he expected that in the spring the Germans would launch a large-scale offensive, and in making his preparations to meet it he could not afford to retain any particularly vulnerable point. As a result the commander of the Third Army was told to " select a good winter line " and make arrangements for a withdrawal in the Marcoing—Bourlon area ; but no orders were to be issued. General Byng accordingly warned Lieut.-General Fanshawe, commanding the V. Corps, that a withdrawal was contemplated and that plans for it must be prepared.

On the morning of the 3rd December, Sir Douglas Haig paid a visit to General Byng at Albert. The latter estimated that he would require two extra divisions if the Marcoing—Bourlon salient were to be held permanently ; he had selected a rear line—for the most part it coincided with the

Digitized by Google

Hindenburg support system, and included the defences of Flesquières—which was strong and suitable ; and he had no particular anxiety concerning the position about la Vacquerie and on Welsh Ridge.[1]

The Commander-in-Chief thereupon decided that the withdrawal should take place with the least possible delay and the formal order was issued ;[2] General Byng saw the commanders of the III. and V. Corps in the afternoon so that the preliminary preparations could be put in hand.

In the evening Sir Douglas Haig acquainted Sir William Robertson with his decision. In his telegram he said :

"The present line could be held, but in view of the enemy's " present activity it would use up troops which, in view of " your instructions[3] and the man-power situation, I do not " feel justified in devoting to it. My available reserves to " meet serious attack are very limited, and the troops need " as much rest as possible after their strenuous exertions " since April. Owing to this, combined with the state of " man-power and the loss of troops already sent to Italy, " I have had to ask Pétain to hold reinforcements ready " near my right in case the enemy's attacks are continued " and extended. I see no prospect of being able to take " over French line while the present situation continues, " nor can I despatch further troops to Italy unless the War " Cabinet decides that risks which I cannot recommend " are to be taken here. The withdrawal from the Bourlon " salient will probably be carried out to-morrow night."

It has already been noticed that the lack of reinforcements to bring his battle-wasted divisions up to establishment and the demand for troops for Italy were among the chief of the Field-Marshal's problems at this period. Moreover, these problems were complicated by the necessity of taking over front from the French, a measure to which Sir Douglas Haig was already committed although the Cambrai offensive had delayed its execution.[4]

In the afternoon of the 4th December an enemy concentration near Moeuvres[5] which seemed to threaten an

[1] la Vacquerie was lost later in the day.

[2] See Appendix 19.

[3] See page 123.

[4] These matters are treated at considerable length in the opening chapters of the succeeding volume " 1918 " Vol. I.

[5] See Sketch 19.

Digitized by Google

attack upon the left sector of the 2nd Division was dispersed by artillery fire ; otherwise there was little German activity upon the front of the V. Corps. Prospects appeared favourable for the withdrawal from the Marcoing—Bourlon salient, which had become the chief concern of Lieut.-General Fanshawe's divisions and of the 6th Division (III. Corps) on their right.

The Third Army order for the withdrawal, an operation which relinquished to the enemy Marcoing, Nine Wood, Noyelles, Cantaing, Bourlon Wood and ridge, Anneux, and Graincourt, was issued at 9.30 a.m., the intention and the general plan having been made known previously to the commanders and staffs of the V. and III. Corps.

Generally speaking the new position, designated "the " main line of resistance for the winter", incorporated the Hindenburg support system from a point south of Marcoing to Hughes Trench on the eastern bank of the Canal du Nord, and thence ran westward beyond the canal to join the old British front line on the spur north-east of Demicourt. By nightfall on the 4th December reserves were to man this position. All batteries in front of it were to withdraw during the night. By 3 a.m. on the 5th the main bodies of infantry returning from the old front were to be west of the line Premy Chapel—la Justice—Graincourt—sugar factory on the Bapaume road, called the " Yellow Line", some 2,000 yards forward of the new main line of resistance. The rear-guards left in occupation of the old front were to begin their withdrawal at 4 a.m. The Yellow Line—henceforward called the Covering Position—was not to be relinquished until the night of the 5th/6th December at the earliest ; farther back a line of posts was to be occupied in front of the new main line of resistance upon which there was still much work to do.

The lower formations had little time in which to make their arrangements and carry out their preparations : in the interests of secrecy[1] the hour, even the day, was not generally announced until the afternoon of the 4th. But many units had, perforce, to receive preliminary warning on account of the nature of their tasks.

To V. Corps instructions,[2] which covered such matters as the removal of stores and material, the reeling in of telephone

[1] No mention of the impending operation by telegraph or telephone was allowed.

[2] See Appendix 20.

Digitized by Google

wires, the withdrawal or destruction of captured enemy guns, the destruction of derelict tanks, the demolition of dug-outs and bridges and the preparation of booby-traps, was attached a special note regarding the short notice given : all was to be done that could be done in the time available. A corps artillery instruction allotted routes for the withdrawal of the divisional artilleries and ensured that single guns or sections of field and heavy batteries would remain in position so that the usual volume of fire could be maintained as long as possible during the night of the 4th/5th December ; but such sections and guns had to be withdrawn in time to reach their new rear positions before daylight. Every endeavour was to be made to bring back artillery ammunition and empty cases, the destruction of ammunition dumps being countenanced only as a last resort : no demolitions whether of dumps, bridges, dug-outs, O.P.'s, or other works, were to take place before 4.30 a.m. on the 5th December. The work of destruction in the forward area was controlled by the C.R.E's. of divisions,[1] although divisional R.E. personnel was, for the most part, employed on the new defence works.

Work on the new main line of resistance, heretofore known as a " back line ", had been proceeding, with such labour as became available, since the British advance had reached Bourlon Wood. The 2nd Division was now confronted with the biggest task, for west of the Canal du Nord the new position did not follow an established trench system and much new digging had to be done. Here the help of the 186th Brigade (62nd Division), which had been kept in the forward area, proved invaluable.

A formal order for the withdrawal was issued by the III. Corps at 6 p.m., but the 6th Division, the only one concerned, had received sufficient warning to issue its own operation order nearly four hours earlier. The procedure to be followed resembled that of the V. Corps ; and special measures were taken to ensure that the closest liaison should be preserved between the left of the 6th Division and the flank of the 59th, which formed the right of the V. Corps.

On this day Sir William Robertson transmitted the War Cabinet's approval of the decision to withdraw ; he added that the despatch of the 21st Division[2] to Italy might

[1] See 47th Div. O.O. No. 205, Appendix 21.

[2] Already in the line under the VII. Corps.

Digitized by Google

be regarded as cancelled, pending further instructions. The Commander-in-Chief, in a communication to the C.I.G.S., informed him that the battle front was now held by " com- " paratively fresh " divisions and, when the withdrawal was completed, might be regarded as stabilized. He again mentioned his great need of trained drafts and his present inability either to take over line from the French or to spare troops for Italy : the " very regrettable " decision to with- draw from the Marcoing—Bourlon salient had had to be taken only because of the paucity of fresh reserves.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917 (*concluded*)

4TH–6TH DECEMBER

(Sketches A, 18, 19, 20)

THE WITHDRAWAL TO THE FLESQUIÈRES LINE

When dusk fell on the 4th December, the area behind the British front from the northern slopes of Welsh Ridge to Tadpole Copse sprang into activity.[1] Gun teams proceeded on their way to the forward battery positions; strings of pack animals came up to take their part, with the carrying parties supplied by the infantry and other arms, in the removal of ammunition boxes, supplies and equipment; and sappers, pioneers and infantry worked strenuously on the main line of resistance and new strongpoints in front of it, for a considerable amount of wiring, construction and digging remained to be done. The evening hours were precious, for the moon, nearing the end of her third quarter, rose at 10 p.m. and there was little heavy cloud to obscure the scene. Normal night firing was maintained, and the enemy's response seemed to show that he had no inkling of any unusual movement within the British lines.

The main bodies of infantry moved at 11 p.m. when platoon after platoon of heavily laden men[2] began to dribble back from the front. The general practice was for each battalion to leave a rearguard of about one company, in some cases reinforced by extra Lewis guns; these rearguards, by occasional bursts of fire and the discharge of Very lights from different points, persuaded the Germans that the British front line was not only active but fully manned. By 3 a.m. the main bodies had passed through the Covering Position. Half an hour later began the withdrawal of the rearguards, sapper detachments which were responsible for demolitions being among the last to leave. Dug-outs, some of them filled with ammunition which could

[1] See Sketch 19.

[2] Tools, extra bandoliers of S.A.A., bombs, rifle grenades, S.O.S. rockets and flares, even Stokes mortar shells, were carried away.

Digitized by Google

not be carried away, were usually burnt out with "P" (phosphorus) bombs, and their entrances blown in.

The field batteries were retiring according to plan. In the 6th Division one gun team was lost by German shell-fire, and a battery in the 51st Division had one gun blown to pieces by a direct hit and another badly damaged during a very accurate hostile shoot on the battery position which lasted from 9.30 p.m. to 2 a.m. No other "incidents" were reported by the artillery. The 59th Division withdrew some of its batteries behind the Flesquières ridge at dusk, and these were ready to open fire from their new positions at midnight. The last three batteries of the 47th Division withdrew at 4.30 a.m.; 19 captured guns, which remained in the divisional area, were destroyed. The artillery of the 2nd Division, which had to withdraw across the Canal du Nord left one dump of ammunition, but removed it on the following night[1].

In the 6th Division (III. Corps) the retirement of the 88th Brigade to the new line was followed by its relief by the 108th Brigade of the 36th (Ulster) Division, the newcomers also establishing an outpost position. So departed the last troops of the 29th Division which had been in the battle continuously from the opening day and by its devotion and gallantry allied to sheer endurance and superb fighting qualities had averted disaster on more than one occasion.

From Premy Chapel (inclusive) for a thousand yards southward the Covering Position was manned by the 71st Brigade,[2] the 16th Brigade, on retiring from its posts in and south of Marcoing, going straight into reserve. The 2/Sherwood Foresters, holding the sector of the 71st Brigade south of Noyelles, had no time to blow the river bridges or to destroy the dug-outs before leaving. The 18th Brigade, which provided its own troops for the left portion of the Covering Position[3], had no difficulty in withdrawing from Cantaing.

In the V. Corps the 59th Division, which had the 177th Brigade in front, held its Covering Position with 1½ battalions,[4] and the forward troops passed straight back to

[1] This dump was surrounded by the wire in front of the new main line of resistance.

[2] Two companies 9/Suffolk with extra Lewis guns and one section 71st M.G. Coy.

[3] Two companies 1/W. Yorks. The 2/Durham L.I. was set to dig in on Premy Chapel ridge, in rear, facing Cantaing.

[4] 2/7th Sherwood Foresters (178th Bde.) and 2 coys. 2/4th Lincolnshire (177th Bde.)

Digitized by Google

man the Flesquières defences. Neither the 59th nor the 47th Division on its left experienced any particular difficulty in withdrawing down the slopes of Bourlon Wood.

The 47th Division accomplished a great deal in the way of destruction and removal, and some "booby traps" were arranged. At Graincourt the catacombs were severely damaged so as to be uninhabitable for some time to come. On its withdrawal the 142nd Brigade, which held the front, was required to man the main line of resistance, the 140th Brigade providing troops to hold the forward posts and the Covering Position.[1] Here the 1/15th London, with barely 250 rifles available, had two companies on either side of Graincourt, being too weak in numbers to occupy the village which was, however, patrolled. A section of the 142nd Machine-Gun Company was attached to the battalion.

The 2nd Division, which had the 99th Brigade holding its front, made the commander of the 5th Brigade responsible for the new main line of resistance, the outpost line in front, and also the Covering Position which lay astride the Canal du Nord and was held by the 24/Royal Fusiliers and the 2/Oxford & Bucks L.I. Prior to the withdrawal across the canal of the main body, the 23/Royal Fusiliers drove off with heavy loss, by fire, a party of about twenty Germans. This was the only infantry encounter of the night. The 1/R. Berkshire, which threw a considerable quantity of ammunition down a well rather than leave it to the enemy[2], kept one platoon in the factory buildings on the Bapaume—Cambrai road until 5.30 a.m. on the 5th. On the left the 22/Royal Fusiliers did well to get clear of Canal Trench unobserved. The canal bridge on the main road was blown at 6.21 a.m. by a party of the 252nd Tunnelling Company R.E.

West of the Canal du Nord, where the front of the 51st Division was held by the 154th and 153rd Brigades, no Covering Position was required; but the troops in the old British front, manned by the 152nd Brigade at dusk on the 4th, had to link up with the outpost line of the 2nd Division on their right. The withdrawal of the forward brigades to

[1] The 141st Bde. which had suffered so many gas casualties (see page 214) was now organized as one battalion and remained in reserve.

[2] The 99th Bde. afterwards reported that its battalions had carried out of the evacuated area 410,000 rounds of S.A.A., 4,000 hand grenades, and 500 Stokes mortar shells.

Digitized by Google

and through the new front was accomplished smoothly, even the rear parties at the bombing blocks along the Hindenburg trenches being able to get away in peace. Among the last to go were the two companies of the 1/6th Black Watch (153rd Brigade) which manned the defensive flank on the left.

Before daybreak on the 5th December all movements had been completed. As soon as it was light British ground and air observers watched for signs of a German advance, but the enemy resumed his day bombardment of the evacuated positions. He fired upon Marcoing, Nine Wood and Cantaing until nearly 3 p.m. when he appeared to have discovered, probably by air reconnaissance, that the British had departed.

Hostile air activity had declined since the 30th November but increased again on the 5th December, many combats being fought during this and the following day. During a spell of fine, frosty weather visibility was generally better in the mornings than in the afternoons when a thick haze was liable to hamper general air reconnaissance and air observation for the counter-batteries. The R.F.C., as opportunity offered, continued to engage ground targets with bombs and machine-gun fire. Marquion (3 miles N.N.W. of Bourlon), on which enemy traffic activity appeared to centre, was bombed by No. 49 Squadron[1].

It was nearly 4 p.m. on the 5th December when German patrols were first seen at Nine Wood, the British artillery having already opened harassing fire upon Marcoing, Chateau Talma, Nine Wood, Noyelles and Cantaing. Opposite the V. Corps, small parties of the enemy had pushed forward down the western side of Bourlon Wood about noon, crossed the Bapaume—Cambrai road, and occupied the factory buildings. At 1.45 p.m. a considerable force advanced from the wood, crossed the road, and occupied a sunken road west of Anneux where it was shelled by the British artillery. Towards noon the German batteries had put down a barrage upon the empty Hindenburg trenches south of Moeuvres and infantry soon came forward to occupy them. From 3 p.m. onward the enemy made repeated efforts to advance against the right sector of the 2nd Division's

[1] Ten one-cwt. bombs were dropped on the 4th Dec. and eight similar bombs on each of the two succeeding days.

Digitized by Google

Covering Position, astride the Hindenburg support system, but failed under artillery and machine-gun fire, and the rifles and Lewis guns of the 24/Royal Fusiliers. Parties of Germans succeeded in entering Graincourt although the main approaches to the village were commanded by the machine guns of the 47th Division. When night fell the enemy was beginning to establish himself at a distance of about six hundred yards along the whole front of the Covering Position.

The III. Corps had decided to withdraw from its Covering Position (that is on the front of the 6th Division) before daybreak on the 6th December, and informed the V. Corps accordingly. During the night of the 5th/6th some bickering occurred between British and German patrols, and the British artillery fired at intervals on the approaches to the Covering Position from the north and north-east. At 4.30 a.m. the troops of the 6th Division withdrew without trouble; and by this time the 59th Division (V. Corps) next on the left had secured its flank by digging slit trenches east of Orival Wood, facing north-east. The V. Corps ordered the evacuation of the Covering Position for 5.30 p.m., but the 59th Division was informed that this hour might be anticipated if enemy pressure made it advisable to do so. From dawn onwards the Germans were, indeed, very active: at 6.15 a.m. they attacked without success the right post of the 24/Royal Fusiliers in the Hindenburg support system; later, their attempts to debouch from Graincourt were driven back by fire; before 10 a.m. a body of about 200 Germans observed between Anneux and Graincourt was bombed from the air and dispersed; at 12.30 p.m. the British artillery was shelling the western face of Graincourt where German infantry were again assembling.

About 2.30 p.m. a hostile barrage came down upon the Covering Position of the 59th Division and the ground in rear. An hour later German infantry, variously estimated as consisting of three and five battalions, was seen advancing through the gloom of the winter afternoon. The British artillery proved somewhat late in responding to the S.O.S. signals[1], and the two companies of the 2/4th Lincolnshire about Orival Wood had some difficulty in disengaging when

[1] A special rifle-grenade signal, less cumbersome than a rocket, was used by the Third Army at this time, and many complaints were made that it was not easily visible.

Digitized by Google

the order to withdraw was given; but the enemy was eventually checked with considerable loss by the fire of all arms. A party of Germans who succeeded in entering the beet factory east of Flesquières was turned out by men of the 2/4th Lincolnshire and 2/5th Leicestershire who used the bayonet to some purpose and took a few prisoners[1]. Before the light failed the British heavy artillery caught with deadly effect a mass of Germans east of Orival Wood.

The troops of the 47th Division also had difficulty in getting back from the Covering Position, being compelled to withdraw before they received the order to do so. The two companies of the 1/15th London on the north-western side of Graincourt experienced no trouble, but south-east of the village the remainder of the battalion was involved in the German attack against the 59th Division. The enemy appeared in the right rear of these two companies; later a hostile movement from Graincourt threatened to envelop their left and they were obliged to fight their way out. Losses were heavy and included six officers, whilst the machine-gun section had to abandon its guns.

In the 2nd Division, attacks along both sides of the Canal du Nord at Lock 6 were repulsed during the afternoon and the forward battalions were able to withdraw without hindrance at the appointed time. Throughout the evacuated area 65 dug-outs were burnt and the entrances blown in; Lock 6, with its buildings, was blown at 5.10 p.m.

Rain fell during the night, a prelude to milder weather which followed the frosty spell. Work on the defences continued, patrols were active on both sides, and British artillery and machine-gun fire was opened at intervals upon those localities where the foremost Germans appeared to be digging-in.

Thus by the morning of the 7th the British stood on their "main line of resistance for the winter",[2] the withdrawal having been carried out with complete success. But the salient, though reduced, was not eliminated; if its base be regarded as extending from the vicinity of the Péronne—Cambrai road to Demicourt, it still possessed a maximum depth of about 2½ miles.

[1] Most of them belonging to the *24th Res. Div.*, recently arrived from Russia. According to "Res. Regt. No. 107" the *104th Res.* and *107th Res.* (both *24th Res. Div.*) attacked against the frontage la Justice—Graincourt, their objective being Flesquières and the Hindenburg support system.

[2] See Sketch A.

Digitized by Google

From the forward slopes of the Flesquières ridge[1], where the new line incorporated the Hindenburg support system, good observation was assured over the ground which had been won and was now relinquished, after a struggle lasting eighteen days. Much work, however, remained to be done upon the new position and the defences in rear. Sited by the Germans to oppose an attack from the south-west, the Hindenburg support system had formed the rear edge of their " battle zone " ; and, chosen as the British front line, facing north-east, it required to be adapted to the new purpose. The weakest parts of the whole position were the tip of the salient, where the trenches ran across the lower slopes of Highland Ridge to join up with the Welsh ridge defences, and the sector astride the Canal du Nord where the Hindenburg support and front systems ran out from the British line.

The End of the Battle

Since the 4th December the fighting had died down on the remainder of the battle front except at Welsh Ridge (61st Division III. Corps) where the enemy was still striving to improve his forward positions[2]. West of la Vacquerie the 183rd Brigade held the original British front, the line turning eastward across the old No Man's Land to Corner Work. The 182nd Brigade was extended along the slopes of Welsh Ridge as far as Ostrich Avenue, still in British possession, but held nothing below the Masnières road in la Vacquerie valley except a small portion of Emden Support.

At 10 a.m. on the 5th, after an intense bombardment, German attacks were delivered along Ostrich Avenue, now almost completely shattered by shell-fire, and up the Hindenburg front system. When the German efforts slackened about 1.30 p.m. the 182nd Brigade had yielded no ground whatever. At 3 p.m., however, came a fresh onslaught, Germans advancing eastward along Ostrich Avenue and northward over the open against the same objective. This time they secured the trench, although they paid a heavy price for it. Meanwhile, bombing attacks up the Hindenburg front system were forcing back the remnants

[1] See Sketch 19.
[2] See Sketch 18.

Digitized by Google

of the 2/7th R. Warwickshire; but here the leading companies of the 9/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers[1] were at hand to stiffen the defence. Major T. E. Leroy of the Warwickshire led parties of both battalions in a successful counter-attack during which he was killed; even so the Germans were left in possession of the Hindenburg front system to a point not far below the crest of the ridge.

At night the 109th Brigade took over most of the line of the 182nd Brigade by relieving the 2/7th and 2/8th Warwickshire[2]. The 183rd Brigade was relieved by the 184th, but before this was accomplished the 2/4th Berkshire in Corner Work were driven out by a sudden attack[3].

The fighting on the 6th December was mainly confined to the front taken over by the 9/Inniskilling Fusiliers which included the Hindenburg front system on the right to the remains of Ostrich Avenue on the left. At 6.30 a.m. the battalion, supported by the remnants of two companies of the 2/7th Warwickshire retained for the purpose, attacked and recaptured the positions lost on the previous day but could not hold them against counter-attack[4]. The struggle, which swayed to and fro all day, was remarkable for the gallant leadership of 2nd Lieut. J. S. Emerson of the Fusiliers who, though wounded, headed an attempt to repel the German bombers until he fell mortally hit[5]. At night it became necessary to relieve the 9/Inniskilling Fusiliers by the 11th Battalion which on the 7th December drove the Germans from their lodgments in the British line by a well-planned attack, made with the support of Stokes mortars. Thus both sides remained, manning a welter of shattered trenches and shell craters, the British having the advantage in that they occupied the higher slopes of Welsh Ridge.

West of Gonnelieu the 1/Irish Guards (1st Guards Brigade) had been attacked at 6.30 a.m. on the 5th December, but the German bombers who succeeded in entering the trenches

[1] Of the 109th Bde., 36th (Ulster) Div. See below.

[2] The losses of the 182nd Bde. amounted to 52 officers and 710 other ranks.

[3] The heaviest casualties in the 183rd Bde. were those of the 2/6th Gloucestershire (17 officers, 308 other ranks) and 2/4th Gloucestershire (6 officers, 229 other ranks).

[4] Prisoners taken belonged to the *I/395th* and *II/395th Regt.* (*9th Res. Div.*)

[5] He received the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

Digitized by Google

were driven out by counter-attack. At night the 9th (Scottish) Division completed the relief of the Guards[1]. By putting its third brigade into the line the 9th Division also relieved part of the Cavalry Corps, the remainder of Lieut.-General Kavanagh's front being taken over by the 21st Division (VII. Corps) which extended its left. The Cavalry Corps then proceeded to take over from the VII. Corps the front (Ronssoy—Pontruet) held by the 24th Division, next to the French[2].

A brigade of the 16th Division relieved the 165th Brigade on the night of the 5th/6th December, which enabled the 55th Division to be concentrated in reserve. Three days later it left the Third for the First Army. It was not until the night of the 9th December that the 6th, the last division to be relieved of those which had taken part in the tank offensive of the 20th November[3], handed over its front opposite Marcoing to the 19th Division which had come from the Second Army.

General Byng told the Commander-in-Chief on the 7th December that he was still uncertain of the enemy's intentions, although the withdrawal to the Flesquières line had reduced the opportunity for a German " coup " ; he hoped that the two French divisions in reserve behind his right flank might remain there for the present[4]. On the 9th the Third Army issued a warning order that all precautions must be taken against a German offensive which might be launched " during the next few days " with the object of regaining the Hindenburg defences. Another week passed before British Intelligence was convinced that the enemy had no intention of renewing his attacks, but the Battle of Cambrai had ended by the 7th December. For the most part, such fighting as took place on the front of the Third

[1] On the 7th Dec. a prisoner of the *262nd Res. Regt.* (*79th Res. Div.*) was captured west of Gonnelieu. This division had just completed the relief of the *9th Bav. Res. Div.*

[2] The corps fronts, from a point near Noreuil (about 5 miles N.W. of Boursies) southwards, were readjusted on the 15th Dec. when III. Corps headquarters went into reserve. Three days later the Fifth Army (Gen. Sir H. Gough) took over from the Third the fronts of the Cavalry Corps and VII. Corps. See Sketch B for the positions of the Armies on the Western Front at the end of 1917.

[3] It is true that the 36th and 51st Divs. were in the line, but each had had a short period in reserve.

[4] They were retained until the 16th Dec.

Digitized by Google

Army during the remainder of the month may be regarded as incidental to active trench warfare, the chief affair being a local attack east of Bullecourt on the 12th by part of the *16th Bavarian Division* which achieved a limited success[1].

Allusion has been made to work on defences and forward areas which now confronted the Third Army. The general scheme of defence, approved by G.H.Q. and embodied in a memorandum issued on the 14th December after the Army commanders had been consulted, provided for three zones on the German model, the "forward zone", the "battle zone" and the "rear zone".[2] As regards the Flesquières front special instructions from G.H.Q. directed that the base of the salient should form the front edge of the battle zone; and the British front line previous to the 20th November was adapted accordingly. South of Trescault the reserve line dug by the III. Corps and the Cavalry Corps at the beginning of December became the front edge of the battle zone: it extended southward behind Gouzeaucourt to Chapel Crossing and Vaucelette Farm and linked up with the defences of Peizière.[3]

THE GERMAN SIDE[4]

By the evening of the 2nd December, Rupprecht, who thought it possible that British tanks might attack again, was resigned to the fact that the German plan had miscarried. It was impossible to keep the attacks going any longer, as fresh divisions could only arrive by degrees. More, he felt, ought to have been accomplished but, "it "was our biggest success over the British since 1915, at "Ypres." O.H.L., also, were convinced that further operations had little chance of success.

Orders for the consolidation of the line, with certain reliefs and shifting of divisional boundaries, were issued by the Busigny Group on the 2nd December.

---

[1] The action of Welsh Ridge, fought on 30th Dec., is described later. See page 275.

[2] See "1918" Vol. I, Chapter II. for details.

[3] See Sketch 14 and page 237.

[4] From G.O.A. xiii, Rupprecht, Moser, German regimental histories, and information supplied by the *Reichsarchiv* and the *Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres*.

Digitized by Google

After the 1st December only the Caudry Group was heavily engaged. In the fighting near la Vacquerie on the 2nd, when it was reported that the southern edge of the village had been reached, troops of the *28th*, *220th* and *9th Reserve Divisions* took part; and as the *30th Division* endeavoured to advance towards Marcoing Copse and the *107th* attacked in the bend of the St. Quentin canal, nearly the whole front of the corps was in action, although no general attack had been ordered for this day. The 3rd, which saw the capture of la Vacquerie and sharp fighting along Welsh Ridge and about Marcoing, was another heavy day; but on the 4th, when the line was being thinned by the withdrawal into reserve of the *28th* and *220th Divisions*, the Group issued orders for consolidation. The *107th Division* advanced to Marcoing station, but not, it seems as far as the village, at 3 a.m. on the 5th, " the British, under "the pressure of the Caudry and Arras Groups having vacated " Graincourt, Cantaing, Noyelles and Anneux ". The British withdrawal to the Flesquières line was obviously a complete surprise to the Germans. The right of the Caudry Group is stated to have taken part in the attack on the 6th which secured la Justice Farm and progressed beyond the Graincourt—Marcoing road. Captures from the British, since the opening of the counter-offensive had amounted to 75 officers, 2,556 other ranks and 85 guns.

On the 3rd December Moser (Arras Group) returned to the Caudry Group the *119th Division* holding his left, from Fontaine to the St. Quentin canal, receiving the newly arrived *24th Reserve Division*. He took the *3rd Guard Division* out of the line. The *Second Army*, he understood, was to make no further attack, " having achieved its " object ". His troops were tired and exhausted and there were none in reserve, but he had Bourlon Wood shelled and gassed at night, " as the tough English were still holding on ". His orders for an attack to be made on the wood next day, by the *24th Reserve Division* following a four-hours' bombardment by 36 howitzer batteries, were not approved by Marwitz. It was not until 3 p.m. on the 5th that he heard of the evacuation of Bourlon Wood, " the first retirement of " the proud English since 1914 ". In the whole battle he claims to have captured 53 officers and 1,670 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

The Results of the Cambrai Offensive[1]

The results of the battle, measured in terms of ground gained or lost, showed little profit. That part of the front which now extended from a point due south of Marcoing to Demicourt, a distance of five miles, represented an advance north-eastward by the Third Army to a depth of two miles: less than had been achieved on the first morning of the offensive. On the other hand, the Germans had pushed forward on a front of four miles between Epéhy and the Péronne—Cambrai road to a depth averaging two miles, which over-ran the British second line.[2]

The wastage and strain to which the Cambrai offensive subjected the Third Army have to be taken into account. In the main battle, which may be regarded as having extended from Lempire to Louveral, the British employed 15 divisions and four cavalry divisions—considerably more than a quarter of their total strength upon the Western Front—and as many tanks, three brigades, as could be assembled. The losses, killed, wounded and missing, of the whole of the Third Army, including Tank Corps and R.F.C. for the period 20th November—8th December[3] were reported to be 44,207, which represents a total of more than 40,000 for the main battle. On the 30th November, the first day of the German counter-stroke, the Army lost, approximately, 6,000 prisoners and 103 field guns and howitzers and 55 heavier pieces.

The Germans engaged 20 divisions. The number of German prisoners amounted to 189 officers and 10,916 other ranks; and 98 field guns and howitzers, 40 heavier guns and howitzers including a number of French and Belgian make, 456 machine guns, and 74 trench mortars were captured.

As usual it is difficult to reconcile the German figures of casualties with our own estimate of them. The official German total of killed, wounded and missing in the Cambrai battle is given as 41,000 of which 14,000 were incurred

---

[1] See Sketch A.

[2] G.O.A. xiii derives some satisfaction from the thought that the German counter-stroke, with only slight superiority of force and no tanks, accomplished about as much as did the British offensive with all its advantages: this was due to "leadership and courage".

[3] Third Army return to the Adjutant-General, dated 10th Jan. 1918. See Appendix 22.

10—23639

Digitized by Google

during the counter-stroke[1]. If we add 30 per cent. for the lightly wounded usually ignored in the German count[2], the total becomes 53,300. A previous calculation[3], based prinpally upon the losses divulged by the German regimental histories, gave a minimum total of 45,000. Curiously enough the German official history admits the loss of 145 guns, whereas our records show the capture of only 138.

As we have seen, the German counter-offensive launched on the 30th November had the effect of diverting to the Third Army front the two divisions which were about to begin the relief of the French on the right of the Army in accordance with the promise made by Sir Douglas Haig to General Pétain in October[4]. Moreover, the success of the Germans on the 30th did much to restore their morale which had certainly suffered a shock by the sudden loss of the Hindenburg front and support systems on a front of some twelve thousand yards. Even the costly failure of their attack against the Bourlon front was regarded as having justified itself when the British retired to the Flesquières line.

The British Commander-in-Chief opened the offensive on the 20th November in the belief that the continuance of his operations on the Western Front provided the best and quickest method of relieving pressure upon the Italians. Afterwards he expressed the view[5] that whereas before the 20th the Germans could reinforce at will Below's divisions in Italy, all question of reinforcement had to be suspended for a fortnight from that date. During this period the Italians, without aid from the other Allies, certainly succeeded in establishing themselves upon the Piave line, but it must be remembered that the enemy's Italian offensive accomplished more than had been intended, according to the original plan.

The Commander-in-Chief was right in principle, for Ludendorff mentions that owing to the heavy German casualties in Flanders during the first part of October two divisions from Russia had to be diverted to the Western

---

[1] G.O.A. xiii.
[2] See "1916" Vol. II, pp. xiv, xv.
[3] Made before the publication of G.O.A. xiii.
[4] It was not until 10th Jan. 1918 that the extension of the British front began. The whole question is dealt with at some length in "1918" Vol. I.
[5] In a report forwarded to the C.I.G.S. on 24th Dec. 1917.

Digitized by Google

Front although they were intended for Italy[1]; but there is no evidence to show that the Battle of Cambrai had the slightest influence upon the Caporetto offensive. Moreover, it appears that German reserves on the Western Front increased progressively during November from seven to 13 divisions, owing to arrivals from Russia[2].

Writing long after the event, perhaps with a tendency to magnify the gravity of a crisis safely passed, Ludendorff asks what would have been the judgment on his Italian campaign if the British had exploited to the full their great initial success at Cambrai[3]; but the effect which such a victory would have exercised upon the course of events remains no more than an interesting speculation.

The Action of Welsh Ridge
30th—31st December[4]

The 63rd (Royal Naval) Division (Major-General C. E. Lawrie) had relieved the 36th and 61st Divisions, and by the 23rd December was occupying the whole of the Welsh Ridge sector which had become the right sector of the V. Corps and of the Third Army[5]. The front was divided between the three brigades[6], each with two battalions forward, one in brigade reserve and one in divisional reserve. It may be noticed here that the battalions in divisional reserve (with no appointed commander) were provided by three different brigades.

The weather was cold and frosty and the ground was under snow when, during the night of the 29th/30th December, the enemy carried out a heavy gas shelling of the British battery areas[7]. At 6.30 a.m. next morning an intense and very destructive bombardment smote the divisional front, smashing in trenches and shelters and exploding dumps.

[1] Ludendorff, p. 491.

[2] Gehre.

[3] Ludendorff, p. 496.

[4] See Sketch 20.

[5] See page 270.

[6] 188th Bde. (Br.-Gen. J. F. S. D. Coleridge).
189th Bde. (Lieut.-Col. H. F. Kirkpatrick in temporary command).
190th Bde. (Br.-Gen. A. R. H. Hutchinson).

[7] Twenty-five field batteries, in three groups, covered the divisional front (C.R.A., Br.-Gen. C. H. de Rougemont). Their positions were in the valley behind Beaucamp. The 17th H.A. Group, behind Gouzeaucourt, could bring to bear four batteries of howitzers and two of 60-pdrs.

Digitized by Google

Fifteen minutes later the Germans were seen advancing in long lines through the morning mist : they were clothed in white to match the snow, and with the infantry came *Flammenwerfer* detachments and parties of pioneers. The British artillery opened on its S.O.S. lines, and rifles, Lewis guns and machine guns took toll of the enemy ; nevertheless, at many points, he entered the forward trenches where the defenders, who held a series of posts and not a continuous line, had suffered heavily from the hostile bombardment.

On the extreme right the 1/Royal Marines was not seriously engaged, but the junction of the Howe Battalion (left battalion of the 188th Brigade and very weak in numbers) with that of the Drake Battalion (189th Brigade) was severed. Here Corner Trench and Welsh Trench were lost, and then Welsh Support which, being on the crest of the ridge, overlooked the British inner lines.[1] Bombing attacks by the Howe along Cornwall Trench and Cornwall Support having failed to dislodge the Germans, Major-General Lawrie ordered a counter-attack by the Anson and Nelson battalions (in reserve to the 188th and 189th Brigades respectively) to be delivered at 4.30 p.m. after artillery preparation. Meanwhile the commander of the Drake Battalion, which was still holding the northern portion of Welsh Support, had arranged to counter-attack with one company of his own and one of the Nelson ; this attack was put in at 3.20 p.m. without proper artillery support and gained no ground. The 4.30 p.m. operation, however, drove the Germans from Welsh Support ; and as they fled our artillery fire did great execution among them.

The Hood Battalion, left battalion of the 189th Brigade, had both flanks penetrated, for the Germans entered Ostrich Lane on its right and Battery Lane on its left where the 7/Royal Fusiliers (190th Brigade) was driven in.[2] Nelson Support, however, was firmly held by the Hood whose men eventually bombed the Germans out ; and during the afternoon two hostile attacks were repulsed by fire.

---

[1] Cdr. C. S. West, R.N.V.R., commanding the Howe Bn. and Lt.-Cdr. A. U. Campbell, R.N.V.R., his second-in-command, were killed by a shell outside battalion headquarters.

[2] Early in the day Lt.-Cdr. P. H. Shaw-Stewart, R.N.V.R., commanding the Hood was killed by a shell.

Digitized by Google

The 7/Royal Fusiliers, right battalion of the 190th Brigade, lost Eagle Avenue, with most of its garrison, and at 8 a.m. a German advance up a sunken road into the northern side of the salient pressed back the left battalion, the 1/4th K. Shropshire L.I. Two companies of the 1/28th London (Artists Rifles), from brigade reserve, counter-attacked about noon and cleared the enemy from the sunken road, where a new line was established. No attempt was made to recover the salient.

During the night the enemy again shelled the British batteries, and about 8.30 a.m. on the morning of the 31st German attacks gained a footing at the junction of the 189th and 190th Brigades; but no ground of importance was lost.

Few prisoners were taken by the 63rd Division,[1] but the German losses from machine-gun and artillery fire were heavy indeed. Casualties in the 63rd Division during the 30th and 31st December amounted to 68 officers and 1,366 other ranks.[2]

[1] One officer and 19 other ranks. Apart from a portion of the *2nd Army Storm Battalion* and *Flammenwerfer* and pioneer detachments the Germans used four battalions of the *185th Div.* and three of the *50th Res. Div.*, whilst seven other battalions held the line. According to "Res. Regt. "No. 229" the operations were intended to secure better defensive positions and were regarded by the divisional commander as successful.

[2] The heaviest losses were sustained by:
Drake Bn. (189th Bde.) 11 officers, 255 O.R.
Hood Bn. (189th Bde.) 9 officers, 250 O.R.
7/R. Fus. (190th Bde.) 9 officers, 238 O.R.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII

RETROSPECT

THE BRITISH OFFENSIVE

The success won by the Third Army on the morning of the 20th November set the bells in Britain ringing and brought congratulations from the King, from the British armies in other theatres of war, from the Lord Mayor of London, and from many parts of the Empire. As the war correspondents prepared their stories of Cambrai the spectacular triumph of the tanks lost nothing in the telling: the penetration, within a few hours, of the formidable Hindenburg defences was hailed as an achievement of the first order.

Trust in new tactics had, indeed, been amply justified. The lengthy artillery preparation which, hitherto, had opened every British offensive now appeared to be out of date, for the accuracy of unregistered shooting and the success of the tanks against uncut wire had combined to recapture the great advantage of surprise. The sceptical among the British commanders were converted. The future of the Tank Corps seemed assured. During the afternoon, however, before the news of the victory was published, the operations assumed a new and less favourable aspect; and henceforward no advantage was to be gained except by the utmost effort and at considerable cost.

To reach the Bourlon ridge and then to wheel left and overrun the Germans in the salient as far as the Sensée river; to isolate Cambrai by sweeping eastward and northward of the town; to widen the gap by turning southward and rolling up the German front towards St. Quentin: these movements involved a return to semi-open and open warfare and were subject to many hazards not previously encountered. Yet the technical efficiency, boldness and foresight which distinguished the Third Army's preparations for the surprise assault by tanks and infantry upon the Hindenburg defences found no counterpart in the measures taken to exploit the success. Apparently General Byng, who had realized more clearly than many of his subordinate

Digitized by Google

commanders the possibilities of the new artillery tactics and of the tanks in a surprise assault, expected a German rout.[1]

Committed to an expanding offensive after breaking a comparatively narrow front, the Third Army was obliged to strike a nice balance between the forces required for the initial assault and those needed for exploitation. Generally speaking, communications were indifferent: there were only two good roads.[2] At the outset the secret deployment of the great mass of artillery and the concentration of the assault divisions, tanks and cavalry led to such crowding in the forward areas that the V. Corps (three divisions), kept in reserve, could not be brought nearer to the battle front than the vicinity of Bapaume, 20 miles away. Then, when the "break in" had been accomplished, and all depended upon a swift advance in force, reinforcements crossing the old British line would have to proceed by the routes which had been opened through the extensive wire and over the wide trenches of the Hindenburg position. Thus it followed that the utmost use must be made of the divisions gathered for the opening phase of the battle. It is perhaps a question whether more should not have been demanded of those brigades which carried the first assault to the second objective (Hindenburg support system) and then settled down to consolidate their positions.

For the advance of the IV. Corps against the Bourlon ridge, regarded as the principal objective by the Commander-in-Chief who had had to insist that it be captured on the first day, reliance was placed upon the reserve brigades of the

[1] Br.-Gen. C. G. Fuller (B.G.G.S. III Corps) asked Major-Gen. L. Vaughan (M.G.G.S. Third Army) over the telephone at 11.30 a.m. on 20th Nov. whether, in view of the reported presence of two unsuspected German divisions in the Cambrai area, the 29th Div. should be instructed not to go so far as its original objective (*i.e.*, the Masnières—Beaurevoir line beyond the St. Quentin canal). In reply Major-Gen. Vaughan said that there was no confirmation of such a report: even if it were true these divisions "might become involved in the debacle if we acted quickly": the 29th Div. should certainly go for its original objectives. Major-Gen. Vaughan then spoke to the Cavalry Corps, pointing out that, if the report concerning these two German divisions were true, it might be possible to "include them in the rout which appeared to have set in".

[2] See Chapter III. Supplies of road metal, for repairs and for the construction of deviations, were always short. There was never enough labour for work on the forward roads and tracks. The C.E. of the IV. Corps reckoned that he required for his corps area the continuous services of a whole infantry division with the bulk of its transport: all he received was one battle-weary brigade at a time. There were 53½ labour companies and 26 "area employment companies" in the Third Army, but these were not organized or equipped for work under fire close behind the front.

Digitized by Google

51st and 62nd Divisions which had made the initial assault. To these two brigades were added a certain—or rather uncertain—number of tanks, three squadrons of the corps cavalry regiment, the corps cyclists, and the 1st Cavalry Division which was expected to turn the enemy's position by a swift movement round his right. These troops were divided between the two divisional commands and the corps command.[1] They hardly resembled the "specially trained "detachments of all arms, lightly equipped" which Sir Douglas Haig had suggested might be placed under a special commander for the task of securing Bourlon and Marquion. Difficulties soon occurred for here, as in other parts of the field, calculations were upset by the unexpectedly stubborn resistance of the enemy, even though he had not yet been reinforced.

The 186th Brigade (62nd Division), ordered to secure the western end of the Bourlon ridge[2], was forced to consume most of its strength and use the rest of the daylight in clearing the Hindenburg support system as far as the Bapaume—Cambrai road. Bombing along trenches held by an obstinate enemy is always a tedious business and costly in casualties; and, although the assistance of the tanks was not to be despised, the machines and their crews had already taken part in the morning assault and were facing an unfamiliar task. The brigade, which certainly did not lack bold and energetic leadership had been given too much to do. It was never in a position to help forward the 51st Division whose failure to secure Flesquières may be ascribed partly to inadequate bombardment but mainly to the refusal of the divisional commander to conform to the battle drill laid down for the co-operation of tanks and infantry in the assault.

The 51st Division accepted the check and did little to help itself: the reserve brigade, which had been given Cantaing and Fontaine for its objectives, was not even brought forward from the old British front line. The 62nd Division, rendered cautious by the situation on its right, tried to restrain the advance of its 186th Brigade, but certainly endeavoured to organize a tank attack upon Flesquières from the west, an enterprise which was hardly likely to succeed without the co-operation of the other arms. The

[1] IV. Corps headquarters, at Villers au Flos, were nearly 8 miles in rear of the British front line at zero hour.

[2] See Chapter VI.

Digitized by Google

IV. Corps, which had retained two brigades of the 36th Division in reserve, did not call upon them although they were at hand near the Canal du Nord.

Actually it was easier to deal with the Germans at Flesquières by thrusting in behind them from the east, where troops of the 6th Division (III. Corps) had established a defensive flank on the Premy Chapel ridge; but this brigade (the 18th) was chiefly concerned with protecting the left of its own corps[1]. Action was, indeed, contemplated and discussed: nothing was done. The nearest brigade commanders were too far in rear to obtain early knowledge of the situation, and communication was so slow that they could not, without long delay, adopt the appropriate measures even if they had possessed the authority to do so. Both IV. Corps and III. Corps received their information late, and a misunderstanding arose when an attempt was made to arrange concerted action.

The 1st Cavalry Division, whose mission it was to turn the Bourlon position from the east, exercised little influence upon the course of events. With the best of intentions the IV. Corps sent the cavalry commander, from time to time, orders which were, or should have been, unnecessary and information which he could have obtained more quickly by using his own patrols to keep in close touch with the progress of the advance. Unknowingly the corps may thus have exercised a restraining influence. General Byng afterwards explained the tardiness of the cavalry by the deadlock at Flesquières, but the presence of the enemy in the village did not menace the sheltered route along Grand Ravin by which the division was to reach Premy Chapel and Nine Wood.

The check to the 51st Division might well have quickened the resolution of the cavalry leaders and hastened their advance. Men and horses were as well trained as could be, considering that none of the regiments composing the 1st Cavalry Division had fought as cavalry since the autumn of 1914; and there remained plenty of subordinate leaders of the right quality, although many officers, impatient for action, had transferred to the R.F.C. and the infantry. A number of the senior officers, however, remembered how

[1] On 14th Nov. the Army had pointed out to corps that "the capture "of the ground near Premy Chapel may be of considerable assistance in "the reduction of the Flesquières ridge if the enemy is still holding out "there". Nevertheless the 18th Bde. understood that its rôle was a distinctly defensive one.

Digitized by Google

vulnerable were bodies of horse to the fire of even a few machine guns and, with some reason, were more fearful of wire than ever they had been in the hunting field. They therefore favoured the cautious approach and attached too much importance to the enemy's random shooting[1]. It was this attitude of mind which influenced the whole division, with the result that not more than one brigade crossed the old British front line on the 20th November ; the company of tanks standing ready to co-operate was given no order ; and the three squadrons which actually engaged the enemy were only able to do so when dusk was falling and the opportunity for decisive mounted action had passed.

The advance across the Schelde river and the St. Quentin canal with the object of manœuvring the enemy out of Cambrai was regarded by the Commander-in-Chief primarily as providing flank protection for the main attack ; but this flank protection was of particular importance, seeing that the western suburbs of Cambrai reached to the lower slopes of the Bourlon ridge. General Byng, indeed, employed stronger forces in the area of the III. Corps than he did in that of the IV. Corps : three divisions (12th, 20th and 6th) and two brigades of tanks to break through the Hindenburg defences and extend protective flanks ; another division (29th), with tank assistance, to secure the passages over the waterways; and two cavalry divisions, followed by two more, to sweep round the eastern and northern exits of Cambrai.

The Schelde river and St. Quentin canal, backed as they were by the Masnières—Beaurevoir line, constituted a considerable obstacle if resolutely defended. The Third Army did not anticipate that this would be the case, and relied upon a swift advance of tanks to capture the main bridges at Masnières and Marcoing before the defeated enemy could demolish them[2]. That the tanks did not wholly succeed in their mission[3] is something to the credit of the remnants of the German divisions which had been driven from the Hindenburg defences. And it was the resistance of these remnants, before the *107th Division* began to reinforce them,

[1] Undoubtedly the disappointments of 1916, on the Somme, and in the battles of Arras, April 1917 (See " 1916 " Vol. II and " 1917 " Vol. I) had not been forgotten.

[2] See Chapter V.

[3] In his August plan for a large-scale tank raid Lieut.-Colonel Fuller had regarded the canal as circumscribing the eastward movement of the tanks. See page 6.

Digitized by Google

which administered the first check to the brigades of the 29th Division when, organized for a pursuit but weighed down with the equipment for a trench-to-trench attack, they appeared before Masnières and fought their way over the canal at Marcoing. The headquarters of the 29th Division had remained near Gouzeaucourt, nearly six miles in rear; most of the tanks in the vicinity of the canal, and many bodies of infantry, were not under its command; those tanks which had been allotted to its infantry brigades were not working in co-operation with them; and the advance of its own artillery had been delayed. In the absence of unified direction and control precious time was lost and the British situation became more and more difficult as German reinforcements began to arrive. By the early afternoon all hopes of passing the cavalry across the canal had faded.

The Commander-in-Chief had insisted that more than one cavalry division must cross on the opening day of the offensive; but, even if all had gone according to the Third Army plan, this might well have proved impossible seeing that the bridges at Masnières and Marcoing only were to be used. Even the extension of the defensive flank along the Bonavis ridge was primarily intended by the Army "to "facilitate the crossing of the canal at Masnières by the "cavalry"; and, although the III. Corps was expected to seize the crossings at Crèvecoeur if the enemy's resistance weakened in that vicinity, no definite order to do so was issued.[1] The neglect of the canal crossings east of Masnières is more difficult to understand when it is remembered that the gap in the German position was, in any case, to be widened as far as Crèvecoeur and beyond in the next stage of the British advance. The Commander-in-Chief had emphasized the need to expedite such action.[2]

After retreating from the Hindenburg position the enemy continued the fight in the direct approaches to Cambrai, Masnières—Noyelles, extending later to Cantaing. It was in this quarter, too, that the bulk of the *107th Division* came into action as it arrived upon the scene. So it happened that the stretch of canal between Masnières and Crèvecoeur, across which lay the direct line of advance for

[1] See Appendix 1.

[2] It became more urgent still when, on 19th Nov., arrangements were made for French forces to cross at Crèvecoeur and turn southward. See page 24.

Digitized by Google

the British cavalry, was left undefended by the Germans until very late in the day. Meanwhile the 5th and the 2nd Cavalry Divisions, whose passage through the Hindenburg defences was restricted to two routes, continued on their way to Masnières and Marcoing only to find their way barred. There seems to be no reason why the two divisions, once they began to get clear of the Hindenburg support system, could not have approached the canal upon a front wide enough to include all the crossings west of Crèvecoeur.

General Byng afterwards explained that, for reasons of secrecy, no reconnaissance was possible beforehand, so that the country remained quite unknown to the Cavalry Corps. As the canal lay far behind the German front, personal reconnaissance was, in any case, impossible, except from the air, before the opening of the offensive ; which was all the more reason for an intensive study by the cavalry staffs of maps and of air reports and photographs. Moreover, British Intelligence had collected details of all the principal bridges between Crèvecoeur (inclusive) and Noyelles.[1]

As soon as the Battle of Cambrai was ended the Commander-in-Chief brought up for discussion[2] the three principal problems which he considered had arisen in the endeavour of the Third Army to exploit its success. These were the manner in which cavalry should turn to account a fleeting opportunity ; the distribution, movement and employment of reserve divisions ; and the position of commanders and the systems of divisional control. None of the three had received sufficient study prior to the 20th November. Perhaps the failure of the " cavalry spirit " could not have been foreseen, but definite guidance was required by subordinate commanders who, in many cases, were inhibited by their long experience of trench-to-trench attacks with limited objectives, almost mechanical artillery assistance, and a rigid system of command. It was necessary to ensure that the training and equipment of the troops of all arms enabled them to advance boldly and swiftly. Reserves required to be pushed well forward so that what one divisional commander called an " advance in depth " might be achieved. It had to be realized that command could only be exercised efficiently from forward points, preferably

[1] See Note at end of Chapter II.

[2] At the conference of Army commanders held at Doullens on 7th Dec. 1917.

Digitized by Google

with a view of the operations but at all events in close communication with the fighting troops.

A German military writer, who has unkindly remarked that British despatches dealing with the attacks of 1917 were found valuable because they showed how not to do it,[1] points out that an attack cannot be made to roll on like a piece of mechanism: leaders must lead: pauses to reorganize prevent rapid exploitation and are unnecessary if the troops know the intentions of their commander: regimental (brigade in the British service) commanders must be self reliant: divisional commanders should be well to the front. This certainly expresses the method and the spirit required to seize the opportunity for a rapid advance against a disorganized resistance.

All, however, depends upon the ability of the troops to withstand the physical and moral strain. Endurance is everything and can be expected only from men fit and trained to the task.[2] The manifest advantages of a light equipment which permits of prolonged exertion without undue fatigue have to be weighed against the essential requirements of " fighting order ". At Cambrai the British infantryman went into action carrying about 72 lbs. weight.

The 21st November, second day of the offensive, saw the Third Army still striving in vain for the objectives of the previous afternoon. Ill-co-ordinated attacks made by the same tired troops with inadequate artillery support met with comparatively little success against an enemy who was regaining his confidence and increasing his strength.[3] The position of the III. Corps when its offensive closed down at night remained unsatisfactory in the highest degree.

The decision then made by the Commander-in-Chief to persevere with the attack against the Bourlon ridge was not justified by the events of the following days. It was no part of Sir Douglas Haig's intention that the Third Army should be drained of its strength by prolonged fighting of an inconclusive nature, but he under-estimated the power

[1] Jochim i. p. 12.

[2] A special effort, even if all went well, was demanded of the 29th Div. (see page 68 and Appendix 12). Before the battle the III. Corps required from the divisional commander an assurance that too much was not being asked of the troops.

[3] See Chapter VII.

Digitized by Google

and the tenacity of his adversary.[1] In allowing the offensive to proceed he was accepting a greater risk than he knew; but his decision was in accordance with his general policy of 1917, having regard to the situation on the Western Front as a whole and in the other European theatres of war. At this period he was only too well aware that of all the Allied armies none but his own was capable of offensive action; and by offensive action he sought, consistently, to prevent a Franco-German battle, initiated by the Germans, which would demand his intervention under the most unfavourable conditions.

Thereafter, the British attacks at Bourlon never possessed the preponderance of strength necessary to secure their objectives. The knowledge that reserves were strictly limited induced a reluctance on the part of the local commander to hazard an offensive "à outrance" against the ridge, with the inevitable result that a number of piecemeal operations led to heavy losses with no compensating advantage.

The experience gained at Cambrai, particularly in preparing for the initial assault, was to prove of the utmost value in August of the following year. It was not until then that the British armies in France were able to mount another large-scale offensive.[2]

As regards the preliminary preparations, despite the undoubted success of the unregistered artillery bombardment and the barrage, it was obvious that better facilities were needed for the calibration of guns.[3]

Artillery officers required more training in map reading and elementary survey, so that the work of the survey companies R.E. might be lightened.

The railway arrangements for the concentration of the tanks answered very well. For future operations, when larger forces might be employed and to achieve surprise reliance might have to be placed upon rapidity of concentration rather than cover from view, more rolling stock of a

[1] See Chapter VIII.

[2] See the Battle of Amiens, "1918" Vol. IV.

[3] Some 60-pdrs. transferred to the Third Army for the Cambrai battle had their muzzle velocity (under standard conditions) painted on them, a practice which was well worth following in all batteries, provided the information could be kept up to date.

Digitized by Google

special type would be required.[1] To facilitate detraining, trucks constructed as mobile ramps were suggested. It was hoped that the new model tanks which were in production would have a circuit of action wide enough to enable them to go straight into battle from the detraining point.

When the advance began it became obvious that the artillery lacked experience of mobile warfare, although some brigade and battery commanders showed themselves well able to cope with the demands of the altered situation. There was some tendency to rely upon map-shooting when conditions called for the establishment of O.P.'s and the usual observation of fire. The extension and maintenance of signal communications became a major problem, for the rapidity and depth of the advance was unprecedented. It was afterwards suggested that special tanks, fitted with the means of cutting a cable trench and laying cable therein, and provided with signal office equipment, would be a welcome addition to the signal service. A complete chain of short-range wireless communications was deemed indispensable for future offensive operations.

Close support of ground attacks by low-flying aircraft, which engaged by bombs and machine-gun fire enemy infantry, machine-gun posts and batteries, had been organized on a bigger scale than ever before; but such operations proved costly. The R.F.C. found that a clearly marked advanced landing ground as near as possible to the battle front, was necessary;[2] also that reserves of machines should be kept with squadrons, and reserves of pilots with Wing headquarters, if squadrons were to be kept up to strength as the battle proceeded. Air observation was limited throughout by poor visibility.

The combined training of tanks and infantry for the trench-to-trench assault was on the right lines. As the Commander-in-Chief pointed out whilst watching the preliminary exercises, the infantry would still find scope for the employment of all its weapons—rifle, Lewis gun, bomb, rifle grenade, Stokes mortar and, on occasion, the bayonet—for the older arm was the partner, not the hand-maiden, of

[1] For the transportation of tanks by rail, see "Transportation", pp. 310 *et seq.*

[2] One was established at Bapaume, with reserves of petrol, oil, bombs and ammunition; spare parts for all types of machines; and parties of mechanics.

Digitized by Google

the younger and the association must not make it less self-reliant. This was demonstrated during the fight in the Hindenburg defences at points where mechanical breakdowns and other casualties to the tanks left the infantry to carry its objective unaided.

If the combination did not prove so happy in the later stages of the offensive the reasons are not far to seek. Tanks and infantry had not been trained together for open warfare, and no reserve of tanks was available for this phase of the offensive. For the all-important task of crushing a way for the infantry through the German wire on a front of more than 10,000 yards nearly the whole of the tanks were used. Despite the representations of the senior Tank Corps officers none were kept in hand to be employed against more distant objectives, although previous experience had shown the necessity for such a reserve.[1] Some 350 tanks were employed in the first stage of the offensive and the Tank Corps reckoned that an equal number in the reserve echelons would have not been too many.

The tanks which emerged from the fighting in the Hindenburg trenches to take part in the exploitation of the success were manned by tired crews and, in some cases, were beginning to run short of ammunition and fuel. Cohesion with the infantry was lost. To take one instance, in planning the advance towards Bourlon it had not been considered possible to attach tank sections to particular infantry units, for the very good reason that the tanks had to rally and reorganize before coming into action again. Had reserve echelons existed they could have trained with the reserve infantry brigades and battalions and advanced with them. Such homogeneous forces consisting wholly of fresh troops, tanks and infantry with an understanding of how to work together by combining fire and movement, might have been used to good effect.

It is true that once the advance had cleared the elaborate trench systems and reached the dry downland containing few shell craters, the pace of the tanks much exceeded that

[1] "A strong reserve should be kept in hand to turn the accident of battle "in our favour. If continuity of action is aimed at tank units should "be formed in sufficient depth to enable the leading echelon to be with-"drawn and refitted so that it may be ready to return into action a little "before the last echelon is exhausted."
Extract from "Notes" issued by Tank Corps H.Q. Oct. 1917 and approved by G.H.Q.

Digitized by Google

of the infantry. Tank commanders reported that, in the region of Graincourt on the afternoon of the 20th November, further progress was possible if the infantry had not been so tired; and the Tank Corps had already come to the conclusion that some form of rapid transportation was needed by the infantry. Nevertheless, infantry on foot could be used in effective co-operation with tanks under the conditions of semi-open and open warfare. The main enemy of the tank had proved to be the German field guns, and the machine—the Mark IV. model used at Cambrai—was at a disadvantage in that the vision of its occupants was limited and its powers of manœuvre indifferent. It needed the eyes, the special mobility and the fire power which the infantry possessed.

Although it followed that the tank advance might sometimes have to slow down in the face of opposition if it were not to forfeit the co-operation of the infantry, there was no reason why special tank detachments should not be despatched at top speed to secure objectives of special tactical importance. This was, indeed, the plan adopted by the III. Corps[1] on the 20th November in order to secure the crossings over the St. Quentin canal from Masnières to Marcoing (both inclusive), and small bodies of infantry were hurried forward to support the machines; but the combined effort was neither properly organized nor controlled.

After the initial assault the Tank Corps was never given time to reorganize and refit, so that it might do itself full justice in action. The detachments which it was able to provide for the various engagements which followed were "scratch teams", hurriedly made up at very short notice. Generally speaking, there was little or no time for reconnaissance, that most important preliminary to tank action, and the improvised companies were called upon to work with infantry which either did not possess the habit of co-operation or had no knowledge or experience of what a tank could and could not do.

This lack of co-operation was particularly noticeable in the fighting for the villages. At Flesquières[2] the tanks

[1] See Appendix 3.

[2] See Chapter VI.

Digitized by Google

entered and drove the Germans to cover, waited in vain for the infantry to arrive, and then withdrew ; the infantry made its effort when the departure of the tanks had enabled the enemy to come out and man his defences again. At Fontaine,[1] where the German anti-tank measures were more formidable, the tanks likewise went in but were not able to suppress the German fire which checked the infantry at the approaches to the village. At Bourlon[2] the enemy could not prevent the entrance of the tanks, but he succeeded in cutting them off from the infantry ; in a subsequent action the tanks went in and engaged the defenders and then withdrew, being completely out of touch with the infantry which fought its way into Bourlon later.

Bourlon Wood, in itself, was an extensive tank obstacle, for through it the only practicable lines of advance were the rides : defiles which were better avoided by the new arm.

Br.-General Elles and his staff realized that in the later stages of the offensive the Tank Corps had been badly handicapped by the lack of sufficient supply and signal personnel of its own. Anticipating that tanks would play a much greater part in future offensives they put forward proposals for a corps establishment of two divisions, each of three brigades, with services on the usual corps and divisional scale : corps signal company with wireless section and cable-burying section, ammunition park and supply column ; divisional first line (G.S. limbered wagons), train (supply tanks) and column (M.T.) transport; divisional signal companies and divisional field companies R.E. and tank field companies, the last-named to replace the tank salvage company which had done so much good work in Flanders.[3] Simultaneously with the expansion of the corps the battle training of tanks with infantry would have to proceed, the ideal being that all tank and all infantry formations in France should be practised in the co-operation of the two arms.

---

[1] See Chapter VIII.

[2] See Chapter VIII.

[3] The question of the expansion of the corps was discussed by the Commander-in-Chief with Br.-Gen. H. J. Elles and Maj.-Gen. R. H. K. Butler (D.C.G.S.) on the 3rd Dec. Owing to the manpower situation it was difficult to see how the additional officers and men were to be obtained.

Digitized by Google

The Tank Corps looked forward to receiving the improved models then in production,[1] but favoured a long tank able to span wide trenches without having recourse to such a troublesome, if effective, improvization as the fascine. Such a tank would be able to place bridges over the trenches for the passage of the medium tank which, being speedy and easy to manœuvre, would have the special task of engaging the enemy's anti-tank artillery.

It was considered that in the future the Germans would rely upon artillery—some guns dug in and camouflaged, others kept mobile—for their principal anti-tank defence. Under favourable conditions, which might not often arise, the fire of the tanks themselves could knock out the hostile guns: otherwise they must be dealt with by a special artillery barrage moving in front of the tanks, by the attack of low-flying aeroplanes, or by the use of smoke to conceal tank movement. Smoke might be used by the Germans, also, to blind the tanks, so the latter must be able to steer accurately on a compass bearing. In smoke, sirens might be useful for signalling purposes, and to disturb the enemy's morale.

Obstacles devised by the enemy to stop or delay the tanks, or to separate them from their infantry, might take the form of extra-wide trenches which only a long tank could negotiate, or wire placed in narrower trenches which a man on foot would be unable to cross. In the latter case the passage of sunken wire by all arms would have to be made by means of special bridges dragged forward by the tanks.

The sudden and swift penetration of the Hindenburg position, which embodied the latest defence theories of some of the best brains in the German Army, would not have been possible without the tank. Although the enemy was entitled to attribute the British success, in part, to the small numbers of the garrisons, the weakness of the artillery, and the lack of reserves,[2] he was obliged to give new and serious consideration to the question of anti-tank defence.

[1] The Mark V. which was the same length as the Mark IV. but had a more powerful engine, was easier to manœuvre, and was capable of a slightly higher speed; and the Medium, or "Whippet" (two models, A and B) with a maximum speed of over 8 m.p.h. The Mark V. tank had a thicker and more highly proofed armour, a most necessary improvement.

[2] The German defensive battle to be waged within a succession of highly organized zones postulated the possession of ample forces and a powerful artillery.

Digitized by Google

By the German High Command tanks, or any other new technical means of attack, were regarded as a danger to troops whose morale, it was admitted, had a tendency to decline. It was, however, presumed that German divisions could be trained to withstand a tank offensive, with light artillery as the principal anti-tank weapon. To restore confidence the tank was announced to be more of a phantom than a danger.[1]

Orders were given to secure, without delay, any captured tank for examination and trial. Much was learnt from the defence of Flesquières and from the fighting at Fontaine and Bourlon, troops of all arms being consulted in order to arrive at the best methods of anti-tank defence. As a result the following instructions were circulated throughout Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies.

Ground to be reconnoitred with a view to its suitability for tank action: heavy bridges to be replaced by lighter ones unable to bear a tank's weight: steel rails set at a forward angle in concrete to act as tank stops: village streets to be barricaded with heavy vehicles.

Infantry and machine guns to be disposed in groups, well hidden: armour-piercing bullets to be issued: light trench mortars to be well dug in in order to obtain a flat trajectory but must be able to traverse effectively: bunches of hand grenades can be thrown on to the roof of a tank.

Fire discipline to be strictly enforced: take cover from tanks, then come out and engage the infantry which follows: reinforce in small parties, no long lines: armour-piercing bullets must hit the tank at right-angles (the vital points of the tank were enumerated).

Anti-tank artillery to dig in by sections utilizing inconspicuous positions, ranges to be marked, only direct fire to be employed: zones of fire to include all likely tank approaches: good forward communications to ensure plenty of notice of tank advance: guns in villages to be sited to enfilade the streets: mobile anti-tank sections to be formed with A.A. guns and field guns mounted on lorries: batteries or sections to be attached to reserve and counter-attack battalions: plenty of ammunition to be provided, particularly shell with armour-piercing heads, and some tracer shell.

[1] Tankschlacht, page 183.

Digitized by Google

All batteries to fire on tanks if more important tactical targets are not visible.

Heavy and medium trench-mortars to be dug in at places where tanks may pass—defiles, lanes, etc.

Aeroplanes to attack tanks with bombs and machine-gun fire.[1]

These instructions show the German ideas on anti-tank defence which prevailed after the British offensive at Cambrai, but they became effective only to a limited extent. For instance, the number of A.A. guns which could be diverted from their original purpose was restricted, and the same was true of the field artillery. Static anti-tank defence certainly received less attention as the Germans proceeded with the training of their armies for the offensives which were to be delivered in the spring of the following year.

The German Counter-stroke

The German attack on the 30th November which resulted in the loss of so many British guns and prisoners, all within a few hours, came as a shock to the British people who, ten days earlier had rejoiced in the victory of Cambrai, regarded as safely won. The enemy had achieved no such striking success against the British during the whole three years of trench warfare upon the Western Front; for "Second Ypres" (1915) may be considered as a dogged and successful defence which defeated the German plan.

Accounts of the fighting sent home by the Press correspondents hardly presented the events of the 30th November in proper perspective; for the dramatic incidents of the German drive to Gouzeaucourt and the counter-attack of the 1st Guards Brigade seized the imagination as the gallant and successful defence of the Bourlon—Moeuvres side of the salient could not, perhaps, be expected to do. Moreover, the subsequent withdrawal to the Flesquières line was somewhat of an anti-climax to the repulse of the Germans in the north on the 30th November, a truly notable achievement.

The Commander-in-Chief made personal visits to the Third Army and naturally called for full reports of the fighting, but these could hardly be prepared and collected until the battle had died down. Meanwhile, by the 5th

[1] Borchert, pp. 63–7.

Digitized by Google

December, the attention of the War Cabinet had been called to the accounts which had appeared in the Press ; it seemed that the German attack had been a complete surprise, and its success was the more disturbing because G.H.Q. had expressed such confidence in the decline of German morale. An immediate and full report was required from Sir Douglas Haig.

The united assurances of Sir William Robertson, C.I.G.S., and of Lord Derby, Secretary of State for War, were necessary to convince the War Cabinet that the Commander-in-Chief had no intention of minimizing the reverse, and that he would make a special report as soon as it was possible to do so. Eventually on the 18th December Sir Douglas Haig telegraphed a summary in time to provide information with which to confront an expectant and critical House of Commons.[1] This summary was based upon a report telephoned by the Third Army to G.H.Q. earlier on the same day, General Byng stating that there had been no surprise ; that the disposition of his reserves was well adapted to meet the attack ; and that the reverse could be attributed only to the lack of training of junior officers, N.C.O.'s and men. He was particular to point out that the staunchness of the machine-gunners left much to be desired. Accepting this view, Sir Douglas Haig added, in his message, that those of our troops who gave way quickly may have been overborne by weight of numbers ; that the fire of the machine guns had, in some cases, been masked by retreating men ; and that all the divisions engaged were tired, having had no relief since they attacked on the 20th November. He also said that the resistance organized in rear positions was most creditable.

Next day General Byng was called upon to supply the answers to a number of specific questions asked by the C.I.G.S. for the enlightenment of the War Cabinet. The commander of the Third Army stated in his replies to the Commander-in-Chief that he and all his subordinate commanders were satisfied that sufficient troops were available " in view of the situation as a whole ", consequently no one had asked for reinforcements ; also that no blame attached to any commander.

[1] The delay in sending a written report was due to snowstorms which held up the journeys of despatch riders in France and interfered with cross-channel traffic.

Digitized by Google

All the above information was confirmed in the Commander-in-Chief's written report which was despatched to the C.I.G.S. on the 24th December. Sir Douglas Haig included a summary of the operations from the 20th November onward and attached separate reports regarding the 30th November from the commanders of the Third Army, the VII. Corps, and the 12th, 20th and 55th Divisions.[1] His own considered opinion will show how much he relied upon the testimony of General Byng :

He found no reason to criticize the dispositions of the troops which were adequate in numbers to meet an attack of the strength anticipated and actually experienced. If there were miscalculation it was not of such a nature as to reflect upon the competence of the commanders concerned.

No specific request for reinforcements to meet the expected attack was made by any commander.

It was impossible to determine whether the reverse was due to the fighting value of the troops being below the average or to the task assigned to them being unduly heavy.

Risks had to be taken in reducing forces at some points in order to be strong at others, but the risk taken at Cambrai was not an undue risk, for " the enemy should not have " succeeded in penetrating any part of our defence ".

By this last paragraph it is obvious that Sir Douglas Haig considered that something was wanting in the quality of the resistance to the German attack, but he concluded by saying that the ultimate blame must rest upon his own shoulders. It was he who had decided to press the advance upon Bourlon after the first 48 hours of the offensive had elapsed, and the subsequent fighting and extension of the line threw such an extra strain upon the troops that they were unable to resist as they would have been able to had they been fresher.

The reports from G.H.Q. were examined at the War Office on the 1st January, 1918, by Sir William Robertson (C.I.G.S.), Major-General F. B. Maurice (Director of Military Operations) and Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell (ex-Director of Military Intelligence). In their report these officers approved of the plan and the execution of the 20th November offensive and also of Sir Douglas Haig's decision to go on, after the close of the second day's fighting. They endorsed, in substance, all the Commander-in-Chief's conclusions

[1] A report from the commander of the III. Corps followed later.

Digitized by Google

regarding the reverse of the 30th November; but, in addition to blaming the feeble resistance of certain of the infantry and machine-gunners, they sensed " a certain lack " of efficiency in subordinate leadership ". Some measure of justice was, however, accorded the 55th Division—a stout division, capably commanded, which was again to show its mettle in a great defensive battle in the following spring. It was pointed out that the defences in the divisional sector, over 9,000 yards in width, were incomplete owing to the fact that they had had to be constructed, with inadequate resources, after the retreat of the Germans to the Hindenburg position earlier in the year; and that the division was very tired and much under establishment, whilst it contained many new drafts and young untried officers. This last consideration was also held to apply to the troops as a whole and to emphasize the need of intensive training throughout the Armies in France.

The War Cabinet now considered it advisable to seek the opinion of an independent military authority in whom they had great faith, General J. C. Smuts. He expressed the view that " no one down to and including corps commanders " was to blame ", but was not at all certain that some brigade and " regimental " commanders were not in part responsible, although there was no evidence with regard to them. General Smuts agreed that many of the troops had proved unequal to their task and that the training of junior officers, and N.C.O.'s demanded immediate attention.

In due course the Government informed the House of Commons that the Higher Command was not surprised; that all proper and adequate dispositions had been made to meet the German attack; and that it was not in the national interest that there should be a public debate " on the break-" down which undoubtedly occurred." [1]

Thus it was placed on record that the Third Army had been expecting the German attack; was satisfied that no reinforcements were required to meet it; and had made its preparations and disposed its reserves in accurate anticipation of where the blow would fall. Also no blame attached to any commander, and the sole cause of the

[1] The occasion provoked severe criticism of Sir Douglas Haig by certain private members, but the Government expressed their full confidence in the Commander-in-Chief.

Digitized by Google

reverse, the poor resistance offered by some of the troops, was to be attributed to the lack of training of many of the junior officers, N.C.O.'s and men. It may also be noticed that in the opinion of the Third Army, accepted by G.H.Q., the main German attack was the northern (Bourlon) one, the successful thrust towards Gouzeaucourt being considered a minor operation. As we know,[1] the Germans actually made their main attack from the east, the Caudry and Busigny Groups being given as objectives the Flesquières ridge, the high ground west of Beaucamp, and the villages of Metz, Fins and Sorel.[2]

The judgments passed by the various military authorities at home were in accordance with the nature of the evidence supplied. Before seeking the true explanation of the German success upon the 30th November mention must be made of the Court of Enquiry subsequently set up in France by the Commander-in-Chief. That he took this course shows that he was by no means satisfied of the completeness and accuracy of the reports supplied by the Third Army and sent home by him at the urgent request of the War Cabinet.[3] For his own information he required more details, seeing that the fighting efficiency of his troops was in question. To gather these details the Court[4] assembled at Hesdin on the 21st January, 1918, and finished taking evidence on the 29th. The witnesses, 25 in number, included the commanders of the three divisions (12th, 20th, 55th) principally concerned, several brigade commanders, and a number of junior officers of the artillery, infantry and Machine Gun

---

[1] See page 174.

[2] In his report Sir Douglas Haig states that the Bourlon attack was delivered by 4 divisions with 3 in support, whilst 2 with one in support attacked the British "right flank" on the St. Quentin canal and 2 with one in support struck from Banteux.

Actually the Bourlon attack (Arras Group) was delivered by 3 divisions, advancing through the 2 divisions holding the German front. The Caudry and Busigny Groups, which attacked along the whole front from Masnières to opposite Epéhy, used rather more than 6 divisions, with 3 more in support or reserve.

[3] The Adjutant-General at G.H.Q., Lieut.-General Sir G. H. Fowke, was of opinion that a Court of Enquiry was inadvisable, pointing out that the necessary information could be obtained without such a formal procedure.

[4] President: Lieut.-General A. Hamilton Gordon (IX. Corps); members: Lieut.-General Ivor Maxse (XVIII. Corps) and Major-General R. J. Pinney (33rd Div.).

Digitized by Google

Corps. General Byng did not send Major-General Vaughan his Chief Staff Officer.[1] Lieut.-General Pulteney (III. Corps), Lieut.-General Snow (VII. Corps), and the chief General Staff officers of these two commanders were notable absentees.

In its findings[2] the Court was careful to refrain from criticism of the " higher commanders ", in spite of the fact that the representatives of Third Army headquarters, who agreed that Villers Guislain and Gonnelieu should never have been described as " strong defended localities " supplied some significant evidence. The weakness of the junction of the III. Corps with the VII. Corps at the Banteux ravine was mentioned, but the Court was mainly concerned with the reasons why the British forward positions were taken by surprise and why resistance broke down. Whilst displaying some appreciation of their difficulties the tendency was still to lay all the blame upon the troops.

It will have been noticed that in the course of all these enquiries and expressions of opinion, both at home and in France, how little attention was paid to the basic fact that, when the British offensive closed down on the 27th November, the salient held by the III. Corps and IV. Corps was particularly vulnerable to attack.[3] And, as we know, by the above date there were already indications that the enemy was preparing a counter-stroke. The commander of the Third Army, however, and his Chief of the General Staff paid little heed to the situation on the III. Corps front where the enemy could concentrate strong forces in forward positions out of sight of the British outpost line ; and they betrayed no concern regarding the junction of the corps with the VII. Corps at the Banteux ravine, the most vulnerable point of all.[4] These were not difficulties which had

[1] Being consulted by telephone Gen. Byng said that Third Army headquarters would be adequately represented by a G.S.O. 1 and the G.S.O. 1, R.A.

[2] Forwarded to the C.G.S. by the Adjutant-General at G.H.Q. on 2nd Feb. 1918. Lieut.-Gen. Maxse contributed a special note on the need for the proper organization of the battle training of divisions.

[3] See Chapter X.

[4] See Chapter X, where the weakness of this " hinge " of the salient is described in detail.

At the Hesdin enquiry it was ingenuously explained on behalf of the Third Army that " the idea was that the VII. Corps defensive front should " face east and the III. Corps south-east, and that naturally gave the " Banteux spur as the boundary ".

Digitized by Google

suddenly arisen, for the III. Corps had been on the defensive since the night of the 21st November, eight clear days before the German attack. The remedies lay in the allocation of more troops and guns, which only the Army could provide, and a considerable adjustment of the corps boundary which only the Army could sanction. It is evident that, despite the personal warnings of Lieut.-General Snow (VII. Corps), the Third Army's attention was engrossed by the Bourlon front.[1]

Had he appreciated the need, General Byng might well have asked for reinforcements or pressed for the relief of the tired divisions of the III. Corps. Some measure of assistance would surely have been forthcoming. The despatch of troops to Italy had left the Commander-in-Chief with few reserves at his disposal; yet he began to hurry infantry and artillery down from the north after the German blow had fallen. Corps and divisional commanders were in a more difficult position as regards asking for more troops. Lieut.-General Snow (VII. Corps) had become reconciled to holding a front of nearly 10 miles as best he could with two divisions and a weak artillery,[2] knowing that the Army had no more troops to spare. Lieut.-General Pulteney (III. Corps) saw the 59th Division, which had just arrived in his area, transferred to the IV. Corps, where it went straight into the line on the night of the 28th/29th November. Divisional commanders understood that there was no immediate prospect of relief or reinforcement, and accepted the situation. It was no new thing for British generals to set themselves to do the best they could with inadequate means.

The signs of an imminent German attack had certainly not induced General Byng to alter the dispositions of the divisions which he held in reserve; neither did he issue fresh orders to the formations which were moving, or had just moved, from the battle area. The only cavalry division at hand had been fighting dismounted on the Bourlon front and was not yet reassembled. The Tank Corps had begun to withdrew for refitment. So ill-prepared was the Third Army to meet the German drive across the base of the British salient towards Metz that only one infantry brigade from

[1] This was admitted at the Hesdin enquiry.

[2] His heavy artillery consisted of eight 6-inch howitzers.

Digitized by Google

reserve—the 1st Guards Brigade which recaptured Gouzeaucourt—could be put in to counter-attack before nightfall on the 30th November. Of the hastily aroused cavalry and tanks, only one cavalry regiment arrived in time to assist at Gouzeaucourt, although more cavalry and certain tank detachments came into action later in the afternoon.[1]

No warning order was issued either by the Third Army or the III. Corps, so it is not surprising that, despite the exertions of some subordinate commanders and staff officers, many formations had no expectation of an attack. As we know, the ordinary routine of trench warfare was continued in the 12th and 20th Divisions: large working parties were busy during the night of the 29th/30th November and the 20th Division carried out a brigade relief and a readjustment of its line. Thanks to Lieut.-General Snow (VII. Corps) and Major-General Jeudwine, the left brigade of the 55th Division, whose flank rested in the Banteux ravine, was on the "qui vive" as it had been during the previous night. The failure of the arrangement whereby the III. Corps heavy batteries were to open upon likely German assembly positions south of Banteux at 6.30 a.m. on the 30th November has never been explained.[2]

For the surprise attack which was centred upon the Banteux ravine the conditions of ground and of weather were almost ideal for the Germans. They were able to concentrate their assault troops unseen upon the British side of the canal, and the early morning mist hid the assembly from the close reconnaissance of the R.F.C. The operation was well planned, many bridges being thrown across the canal at the latest possible moment, whilst the short sharp artillery preparation gave little warning of the assault to the most alert of the defenders. How the mortar bombardment destroyed many of the British posts, how the survivors were distracted by the attack of low-flying aeroplanes, and how the German assault groups burst through the gaps to take the remaining centres of resistance in flank and rear has already been described.[3]

The contention was afterwards raised that there must have been lack of vigilance in the forward positions of the

[1] See pages 190–1.
[2] See Chapter X.
[3] See Chapters XI. and XII.

Digitized by Google

55th, 12th and 20th Divisions because no S.O.S. signals were sent up; but a number were, in fact, seen, at least on the front of the 55th Division and the inefficiency of the rifle grenade signal supplied to the infantry has already been noticed.[1] Moreover, it appears that the artillery F.O.O's. in the front line could do nothing, as their signal wires were cut soon after the German bombardment began, and that the intermediate O.P's. were unmanned at the time.[2]

It is difficult to account for General Byng's unshaken conviction that the principal cause of the German success was the failure of the British machine-gunners to hold their ground and maintain their fire. It may have arisen from his erroneous belief that Villers Guislain and Gonnelieu which fell so quickly, were strongly organized for defence, with machine guns sweeping all approaches.[3] Certain it is that many guns were blown up by the bombardment, that many teams remained steadfastly in action until their ammunition was spent, and that some of the guns kept in reserve were overwhelmed before they were able to open fire.[4]

Again, the reports of unarmed infantry streaming to the rear were somewhat exaggerated. A number of these men had been captured, but in the melée were able to break away from their escorts; and once the Germans had begun to get astride the communications of the III Corps the fugitives, if such they must be called, were augmented by gunners, pioneers and various working parties who had either laid aside their rifles or were not provided with

[1] See page 266.

[2] Stated by Lieut.-Gen. Pulteney (III. Corps) in his report.

[3] General Byng contended that many British machine-gunners were "trained as specialists, not as soldiers", and therefore their discipline was not what it should be. He thought that the men should be specially selected from the infantry.

Later in December the Commander-in-Chief directed Army commanders to pay particular attention to the discipline, training, and esprit de corps of machine-gun units "on the efficiency of which so much depended".

Undoubtedly a very high standard was demanded, especially of small machine-gun detachments when called upon to fight without any direct control or guidance from above. Like the older arms of the service the Machine Gun Corps had to contend with the difficulties of maintaining the requisite efficiency during rapid expansion; but the majority of the officers and men possessed a proper pride in the corps and in the importance of its rôle in battle.

[4] Speaking of the attack against the III. Corps G.O.A. xiii states that the British counter-artillery fire was weak; the main resistance came from the machine guns.

Digitized by Google

weapons, transport men, and others who may fairly be classed as non-combatants. There was great confusion and some cases of panic, but the readiness with which most of the men of all arms responded to a call to rally must also be remembered.

The centre and left of the 55th Division suffered heavily and gave ground, but maintained the fight all day with little more assistance than that which the division itself could supply. The 12th Division, with the enemy round its right flank, held stoutly to la Vacquerie, whilst the 20th, after the first shock, successfully defended Welsh Ridge although its reserve brigade was taken away to block the German advance at the northern exits to Gonnelieu, a task which it most admirably performed. We have the German admission that the losses suffered in the effort to thrust across the base of the British salient were very heavy, and that the attack eventually got out of hand owing to the stubborn resistance of our three divisions.

In the struggle for Bourlon the IV. Corps had been allowed to absorb most of the Army's resources so that, as the Commander-in-Chief stated, the tired divisions of the III. Corps, and the 55th Division, were subjected to undue strain, being denied reinforcement or relief. Clearly too much was expected of them. As regards their state of training, they in common with the remainder of the British armies in France were ill-practised in defensive tactics, for Sir Douglas Haig's command had been engaged in costly offensive operations throughout the year so that nearly all battalions were well below establishment and had been allowed no time or opportunity to assimilate the new drafts which arrived at intervals to fill—as far as their numbers permitted—the gaps in the ranks. For the most part the lessons to be learnt from the misfortunes of the 30th November were the old lessons. As the Commander-in-Chief pointed out[1] surprises are always likely to happen in battle. Inadequate wire,[2] unfinished defences, troops who

[1] At the Army commanders' conference at Doullens, 7th Dec., 1917.

[2] "Wire must be put down in such masses that it forms a series of "impenetrable hedges along which field and machine guns can sweep. "Wire must be irregular and placed in thick bundles which are impervious "to wire-cutters. All lines must be wired to a depth hitherto considered "quite unnecessary. Providing the enemy does not adopt a form of "tank, this should ensure safety from a surprise attack." Gen. Byng in comments sent to G.H.Q. 9th Dec. 1917.

Digitized by Google

were too weak in numbers and had been too long without relief: all these factors combined to create a situation which invited surprise. That the consequences were not more serious is to the credit of the troops of all arms who maintained such a dogged resistance after the first onset had exposed the whole British salient to grave danger.

Little more need be said of the events of the 30th November. Before noon the extended southern flank of the German advance, from the old British front line opposite Epéhy through Villers Guislain to Gauche Wood was particularly susceptible to counter-attack from the south-west by fresh troops. This was pointed out at the time by Lieut.-General Snow (VII. Corps); but he had not the means, and the nearest available force was the Cavalry Corps, too far away, in any case, to intervene before the opportunity had passed. The manner in which the 1st Guards Brigade recovered Gouzeaucourt and the successful counter-attack of the 88th Brigade from Marcoing were in the best British infantry tradition. The same is true of the successful defence of the Bourlon—Moeuvres front by the 47th, 2nd and 56th Divisions, of which the 47th and 2nd had just come into the line. Here the concentration of Moser's divisions had, perforce, to be carried out in view of the British observers, so there was no question of surprise; but the assault had the support of a very heavy bombardment and was pressed with tremendous resolution, regardless of loss. The three British divisions, however, dealt with it so faithfully that the Arras Group never had the slightest chance of reaching its limited objectives and was, indeed, fought to a standstill.[1] This was a " soldiers' battle ". The Army and the corps could do little except make preparations for moving back the artillery and manning a back line in case the Bourlon—Moeuvres front did not hold.

The Third Army order, really what the French would have called a " directive ", issued for the counter-attack by the VII. Corps, Cavalry Corps and III. Corps about dawn of the 1st December, was excellent in intention.[2] It seems to follow the precept " tout le monde à la bataille " at a juncture when the greatest possible aggressive action was needed to check the German drive if not to hurl it back. Unfortunately no attempt was made to co-ordinate the

[1] See Chapter XIII.
[2] See Chapter XIV.

Digitized by Google

efforts of the three commands: no representative of the Third Army visited the southern front. Moreover, the forces available were not impressive. The VII. Corps could do nothing more than hold the weary 55th Division in readiness to take advantage of a cavalry success; the three cavalry divisions, for dismounted action, might be reckoned as equivalent to less than one infantry division so far as numbers and fire-power were concerned; the "scratch" teams" of tanks, acting on hastily issued orders and with no opportunity for reconnaissance, could hardly be expected to give of their best although their moral effect might count; the III. Corps could put in only the two brigades of Guards which had not been engaged upon the previous day; and little artillery support could be provided.

The cavalry divisions were not well handled. South of Gauche Wood their advances, made at different times on narrow frontages and with little weight behind them, stood no chance of success; and the mounted attacks were gallant but futile expedients. The tanks, although of great value at some points, suffered heavily and, as was to be expected, exercised no decisive effect. The Guards, however, by their capture of Gauche Wood—with cavalry assistance—and Quentin Ridge and their encounter battle with the Germans in Gonnelieu finally stopped the German thrust towards Metz.

This was the last counter-attack delivered by the Third Army. The reinforcements from outside the Army area were all needed to replace the battle-weary troops in the line. Even so, although the relief of the 12th, 20th and 55th Divisions began on the night of the 1st/2nd December, that of the 12th and 20th was not concluded until the following night, whilst the 55th was not completely withdrawn until three more days had passed.[1]

The fighting at Masnières on the 1st December should surely have been sufficient to remind the higher commands that the position of the III. Corps troops beyond the St. Quentin canal was extremely precarious. It always had been, but General Byng was "reluctant to give up any "ground." The village was evacuated at night by the

[1] The 6th Div. (forming the left of the III. Corps) which attacked on the 20th Nov., remained without relief throughout the battle and was not withdrawn until the night of the 9th/10th Dec.

Digitized by Google

decision of the local commanders, after heavy casualties had been incurred in holding it all day; and this withdrawal still left the devoted 29th Division in a position which invited further attack. By this time the Third Army would have been well advised to break off the action wherever possible in order to check the mounting casualties and relieve the almost intolerable fatigue of the troops. It was absolutely necessary to hold, even at heavy cost, Quentin Ridge, the high ground north-west of Gonnelieu and Welsh Ridge, but no good purpose was to be served by clinging to the positions beyond the St. Quentin canal.

How true this was the course of events on the 2nd December and the succeeding days revealed more clearly still, although the German efforts were flagging for lack of fresh divisions to put in.[1] After the 1st December only the Caudry Group maintained the offensive. Its attacks continued for two more days, and as a result the III. Corps was compelled to withdraw across the St. Quentin canal into Marcoing, after the troops had been subjected to further heavy losses in a gallant but futile attempt to retain a position upon the farther side.

Henceforward the British and the Germans resembled two tired boxers, neither of whom was capable of doing the other any serious harm.

The decision to withdraw from the Bourlon—Moeuvres position to the Flesquières line was, of course, that of the Commander-in-Chief who, apparently received no suggestion from General Byng that such a source was necessary or even advisable. Admirably planned and as admirably executed, the withdrawal provided another surprise for the Germans, albeit a more welcome one than that of the 20th November. This was the closing scene of a boldly conceived offensive which failed of its strategic aims, but is of particular importance because it saw the development of new tactics destined to exercise so much influence on future warfare.

[1] Rupprecht was inclined to blame Marwitz (influenced by Ludendorff) for diffusing his attack over too wide a front instead of concentrating the maximum force upon the decisive operation—the drive across the base of the British salient to Metz. It is true that the commander of the *Second Army* devoted particular attention to Masnières—Marcoing with the Flesquières ridge as the objective.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 1

CAMBRAI 1917

THE THIRD ARMY PLAN

OPERATION "GY"

1. The object of the operation is to break the enemy's defensive system by a coup de main; with the assistance of tanks to pass the Cavalry Corps through the break thus made: to seize Cambrai, Bourlon Wood, and the passages over the Sensée River and to cut off the troops holding the German front line between Havrincourt and that river.

2. The operation is designed to take advantage of the existing favourable local situation. Surprise and rapidity of action are therefore of the utmost importance.

3. The intention of the Army Commander is, therefore: First, to gain possession of the quadrilateral formed by the Canal de l'Escaut—Sensée River—Canal du Nord. Secondly, to clear up the area lying to the west of this quadrilateral.

4. The operation resolves itself into three stages:—

(*a*) The infantry attack on the German organized lines, including the capture of the crossings over the Canal de l'Escaut at Masnières and Marcoing, and of the Masnières—Beaurevoir line east of those places.

(*b*) The advance of the Cavalry to isolate Cambrai, and to seize the crossings over the Sensée River, and of IV. Corps to capture Bourlon Wood.

(*c*) The clearing of Cambrai and of the quadrilateral Canal de l'Escaut—Sensée River—Canal du Nord, and the overthrow of the German divisions thus cut off.

5. The operation will commence on Z-day at an hour Zero. The date of Z-day and the hour of zero will be notified separately.

6. With a view to distracting the enemy's attention and weakening his power of resistance, subsidiary operations will be undertaken by VII., IV., VI. and XVII. Corps, according to instructions which have already been issued (Third Army No. G.S. 56/61 dated 10th November, 1917).[1]

7. (i) The preliminary task of breaking through the enemy's line is allotted to III. and IV. Corps.

(ii) The frontage of attack, boundary between III. and IV. Corps and the first and second objectives are shown on the map attached.[2]

(iii) The time table and barrage lifts for the preliminary task will be issued separately.

---

[1] See Map 1 and Sketch 1.
[2] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

8. (i) III. Corps will be responsible for establishing a defensive flank along the Gonnelieu—Bonavis—Crèvecoeur Ridge. This flank will be pushed sufficiently far south to enable Twenty Two Ravine (S.E. of Gonnelieu) to be used by our Artillery.

(ii) As soon as the brown line has been captured, III. Corps will push forward troops to secure the passages across the Canal de l'Escaut at Masnières and Marcoing, and the Masnières—Beaurevoir line to the East thereof, in order to open a gap for the Cavalry to pass through. It is important that III. Corps should occupy early the spur running down from Bonavis to Crèvecoeur to facilitate the crossing of the Canal at Masnières by the Cavalry. III. Corps will take advantage of any weakening on the part of the enemy to seize the crossings at Crèvecoeur with an advanced guard of all arms.

9. As soon as a passage through the Masnières—Beaurevoir line has been opened by III. Corps :—

(*a*) The Cavalry Corps will pass through to isolate Cambrai and to secure the passages over the River Sensée.

Separate instructions have been issued to G.O.C., Cavalry Corps (Third Army No. G.S. 56/96 dated 13/11/17).[1]

(*b*) IV. Corps will push forward advanced guards of all arms to capture Bourlon Wood. It is very important that Bourlon Wood be captured by us on Z-day.

(*c*) IV. Corps will detail a mounted detachment to round up the Divisional Headquarters at Epinoy as early as possible.

(*d*) III. and IV. Corps Commanders will ensure that the roads allotted to the Cavalry for their forward movement are kept clear of all other traffic from the hour at which Cavalry begin to move forward.

10. It is essential that every advantage be taken by Corps Commanders of any demoralization of the enemy which may occur during the first and second stages, to push forward their advanced guards boldly with a view to carrying out the third stage as early as possible.

11. With regard to the third stage, no precise orders can be issued until the development of the action is known.

The following instructions and explanation of the plan of the Army Commander are issued with the object of assisting Corps Commanders in their conduct of the battle.

12. The original breach must be widened as soon as possible towards both flanks by turning and operating against the hostile troops holding the lines of defence, not by frontal attacks.

Once the breach has been made it must be kept open.

[1] **Appendix 2.**

Digitized by Google

13. To III Corps is allotted the task :—

(i) Of securing our right by forming a defensive flank from our present front line, by the Gonnelieu—Crèvecoeur—Seranvillers spur—as far as La Belle Etoile. This flank must be formed as early as it is possible to do so, so as to set free more of the Cavalry Corps.

(ii) Of widening the original breach by raiding southwards in the direction of Walincourt. For this purpose a cavalry detachment has been placed under the orders of III. Corps. Headquarters and other centres of activity should be rounded up.

14. To IV .Corps is allotted the task of widening the breach by extending the left flank of the Cavalry and pushing westward against the rear of the hostile troops holding the defended line opposite VI. and XVII. Corps.

In carrying out this task, the G.O.C. IV Corps will bear in mind :—

(i) The importance of seizing Marquion as soon as possible.

(ii) The importance of opening the Bapaume—Cambrai road as an avenue of approach for reinforcements and supply.

(iii) The divisional headquarters at Saudemont should be put out of action as early as possible so as to dislocate the enemy defence.

(iv) Touch must be maintained with the left of the Cavalry Corps at Palluel.

15. To V. Corps will be allotted the task of advancing North and North-east to exploit success as far as the River Sensée and to push advanced guards across the Sensée River to gain and hold the heights north of the river.

16. It is not possible at present to lay down definitely the boundaries between Corps beyond the first stage.

As the action develops, V. Corps will be brought into the battle: while VI. Corps will gradually be squeezed out of its present place in the front and will become available for further operations.

17. Throughout the period of operations, G.O's.C. IV. Corps (on the front not immediately engaged), VI. Corps and XVII. Corps will keep a close look-out to take advantage of any weakening of the enemy to push forward advanced guards to clear the isolated area. Corps Commanders must, however, guard against delivering attacks against strongly defended positions without adequate artillery or tank support.

18. Corps and Divisional Commanders must be prepared to move their headquarters forward if the operations on Z-day are successful.

Digitized by Google

19. Separate instructions have been issued to all concerned for :—

(i) Action of the Artillery (Third Army No. G.S. 56/97).[1]

(ii) Action of the R.F.C. (Third Army No. G.S. 56/51 of 9/11/17).[2]

Third Army Report centre unchanged.

LOUIS VAUGHAN,
Major-General,
General Staff, Third Army.

13th November, 1917.
Issued at 7 a.m.

APPENDIX 2

CAMBRAI, 1917

THIRD ARMY INSTRUCTIONS TO CAVALRY CORPS[3]

1. The intention of the Army Commander is explained in Third Army No. G.S. 56/68 dated 13/11/17.[4]

2. The tasks allotted to you on Z-day are :—

First.—To surround and isolate Cambrai, occupying the main points of tactical importance, blocking all exits from the town and destroying means of communication.

Secondly.—To secure the crossings on the River Sensée between Paillencourt and Palluel (inclusive).

Thirdly.—To secure the flank of the forces engaged in clearing up the quadrilateral Canal de l'Escaut—Sensée River—Canal du Nord, and the advance North and North-East of V. Corps.

3. To carry out these duties, it will be necessary for you to pass your leading divisions through on Z-day as soon as the Infantry have secured the crossings at Masnières and Marcoing and have ensured the possibility of your passage across the Masnières—Beaurevoir line. This may happen at any time after Zero plus 4½ hours. You will move your leading divisions to the forward concentration in accordance with instructions already issued (Third Army No. G.S. 56/60 dated 9/11/17).[5]

4. The decision as to when to start moving forward from this advanced area will rest with you. You will, therefore, maintain

[1] Appendices 6A, 6B, 6C.
[2] Appendix 8.
[3] See Map 1 and Sketch 1.
[4] Appendix 1.
[5] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

the closest touch with the progress of the Infantry attack by all means at your disposal.

5. The following routes are being cleared under arrangements made by III. and IV. Corps, and will be available for your movement :—

Villers Plouich—Marcoing.

Trescault—Ribécourt—Marcoing (after the Cavalry Division attached to IV. Corps has passed through).

The railway formation from Villers Plouich to Marcoing is urgently required for construction purposes and is NOT to be used by you as a route of advance.

Twelve wire-pulling Tanks have also been allotted for clearing the wire from Villers Plouich—La Vacquerie—Masnières route. These tanks will work under your orders. You must provide your own parties for any further work required to make this route passable for your troops.

6. Too great reliance cannot be placed in the capabilities of the wire-pulling Tanks. You must therefore be prepared to clear away any wire which still blocks your advance on any of the three routes.

7. In carrying out the first duty assigned to you in para. 2, no large body of Cavalry should attempt to enter Cambrai at first.

The town should be damaged as little as possible. The enemy may attempt to set it on fire and you should prevent this as far as possible, having regard to instructions given above.

8. If the forces which you can get through the gap on Z-day are not sufficient for both the first and second tasks allotted to you, the first task must have precedence over the second. Great importance is, however, attached to your securing the passages over the Sensée River without delay.

9. The following railways should be broken as effectively as possible :—

Busigny—Cambrai.
Le Cateau—Cambrai.
Solesmes—Cambrai.
Lourches—Cambrai.
Solesmes—Haspres—Valenciennes.

10. The Cambrai—Douai railway may be required by us at a later stage, but as it is liable to be used by the enemy for withdrawal or reinforcement, it should be cut temporarily in as many places as possible.

Digitized by Google

11. You will take early steps to round up or dislodge the Headquarters of the Cambrai Group at Escadoeuvres [a north-eastern suburb of Cambrai], the two divisional headquarters in Cambrai, and the headquarters of other smaller units in the area.

12. With regard to your third task, you will maintain touch with III. Corps on your right and with 1st Cavalry Division (of IV. Corps) on your left. The conduct of the Cavalry should be as actively offensive as possible. With a view to causing as much disorganization as possible to the enemy's system, you will carry out such raids against the hostile communications, headquarters, aerodromes, and other centres of activity as may be possible with the resources at your disposal. The position of these centres, etc., is shown on the " enemy order of battle map " and " enemy rear organization maps " which are being issued to you.[1]

13. Further instructions will be issued to you regarding the action to be taken by you after the quadrilateral Canal de l'Escaut—Sensée River—Canal du Nord, is in our possession.

LOUIS VAUGHAN,
Major-General,
General Staff, Third Army.

13th November, 1917.
Issued at 7.0 a.m.

APPENDIX 3

CAMBRAI 1917

III. CORPS OPERATION ORDER No. 224[2]

1. The III. Corps, in conjunction with the Corps on the left, will on a date and at an hour to be communicated later attack the enemy on their front. Subsidiary attacks and feints will be carried out simultaneously by other Corps along the remainder of the Army Front.

2. The III. Corps will attack with the 12th Division on the right, the 20th Division in the centre and the 6th Division on the left.

The 29th Division will be in Corps Reserve and will pass through the 20th and 6th Divisions in order to capture the heights S.W. of Rumilly, Nine Wood and Premy Chapel. Special instructions regarding the hour at which the 29th Division are to advance are being issued to the G.O.C., 29th Division.

[1] Not reproduced.
[2] See Sketches 1 and 2.

Digitized by Google

The objectives and dividing lines between Divisions have already been issued (vide tracing " A " attached to III. Corps Instruction No. 1).[1]

3. The attack will be carried out under the protection of waves of tanks. The allotment of tanks to Divisions has already been detailed (vide para. 9 of Instruction No. 1).[2]

The attack will also be supported by :—

(*a*) standing artillery and smoke barrages, which open on the enemy's front line, and lift from trench to trench as the advance progresses, vide the Artillery Barrage Maps issued to all concerned ;[2]

(*b*) back and flank barrages of smoke and heavy artillery ;

(*c*) machine gun barrages.

The tanks will advance from their assembly positions, 1,000 yds. distant from the enemy's front line, at Z—10 minutes followed by the Infantry. The artillery and machine gun barrages will open at Zero. The final protective barrage beyond the second objective (Brown Line) will lift at times varying from Zero+210 mins. to Zero+240 mins. to enable the tanks to push on and exploit the success.

4. After the capture of the Brown Line, tanks will immediately exploit the success as follows :—

(*a*) The tanks from one Company of " F " Battn, allotted to the 12th Division, will proceed immediately from Bonavis to Masnières, seize the bridges [locations given in map co-ordinates], and form a bridgehead there.

(*b*) The tanks from a Company of " A " Battn. allotted to the 20th Division, will advance immediately to the Canal, and seize the lock and bridges at [locations given in map co-ordinates], and clear the Canal bank from G.25.a. (exclusive) to the Ribécourt—Marcoing Rly. line exclusive [*i.e.*, seize the crossings and clear the canal bank between Masnières and Marcoing].

(*c*) The tanks from one Company of " B " Battn. allotted to the 6th Division will occupy as soon as possible the river, canal and railway bridges at Marcoing, in [locations given in map co-ordinates].

(*d*) The tanks from one Company of " H " Battn., on the left of the 6th Division will push forward to Nine Wood, and secure the Northern and North-eastern margins of the wood, moving one section of tanks through the " Ride ", running from Premy Chapel towards Noyelles.

---

[1] See Sketches 1 and 2.

[2] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

The above tanks will maintain their positions on their objectives until relieved by the 29th Division, or in the case of (*b*) until the 29th Division has passed through.

(*e*) Simultaneously with the above, the 12th Division will extend the right flank of the Corps to about M.2.d.9.7 [1 mile N.E. of le Quennet Farm] and secure observation into the valley of the Canal de St. Quentin. The 20th Division will prolong this flank with a Brigade to the Road Junction at G.26.b.3.0 in les Rues Vertes, supporting the tanks in forming a bridgehead at Masnières, until relieved by the 29th Division. To assist in forming this flank, the 20th Division will take with them the tanks from one Company of " I " Battalion. These tanks will advance and clear the Bonavis—Crèvecoeur Ridge, supported on the right by the 12th Division, and in the centre and on the left by two troops of the III. Corps Cavalry (1/1 Northumberland Yeomanry) placed at the disposal of the 20th Division for this purpose.

The 12th Division and the troops of Corps Cavalry will establish posts along the Bonavis Spur so as to deny it to the enemy, and to prevent hostile observation from this spur of the passage of the 29th Division and Cavalry across the Canal at Masnières.

It is the intention eventually, when the Cavalry have pushed through, to establish the front of the III. Corp facing East along the line Bonavis—Crèvecoeur—La Belle Etoile.

(*f*) The 20th Division will support the tanks at (*b*) with strong patrols followed by a Company, and the 6th Division will similarly support the tanks at (*c*) with strong patrols followed by Companies. Junction between the two Divisions will be effected at the cross-roads at L.22.d.30.50 [railway junction S. side of Marcoing]. The Tanks at (*d*) will be supported by a Brigade of the 6th Division which will be sent forward to hold the line from Premy Chapel to L.19.b.6.4 [Corps boundary on second objective], where they connect with the 51st Division.

(*g*) The 29th Division will be assisted by 12 special tanks in their advance to the heights S.W. of Rumilly, Nine Wood and Premy Chapel. No. 6 M.M.G. Battery is also placed at the disposal of the G.O.C., 29th Division for the operations.

5. The objectives, when gained, will be consolidated, and the defence reorganized in depth.

A support line of posts will be formed by the 12th, 20th and 6th Divisions approximately along the Green Dotted Line, vide tracing " A " already issued.[1]

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

As the flank held by the 12th Division will form the pivot for the subsequent move of the III. Corps to the line Bonavis—Crèvecoeur—La Belle Etoile, the 12th Division will use every endeavour to consolidate the captured line, and to wire it as soon as possible.

6. Special parties will be told off by the 6th Division to get into touch with the 51st Division at the following points :—

In the Hindenburg Line at K.36.b.1.4 [Corps boundary on support line of Hindenburg front system].

Western end of Ribècourt.

In the Hindenburg Support Line at L.19.b.6.4 [Corps boundary on second objective].

Similarly, Divisions will detail special parties on their flanks to effect junction with each other on each objective at Inter-Divisional posts to be arranged mutually between Divisions.

7. A Group of Heavy Artillery is affiliated to each Division. Divisional Commanders should apply direct to their Group for any Heavy Artillery assistance they may require.

The programme for the artillery bombardment, as laid down in III. Corps Artillery Instructions, will not however be departed from without reference to Corps Hd. Qrs.

8. Two troops of the III. Corps Cavalry Regt. (1/1 Northumberland Yeomanry) are placed at the disposal of the G.O.C., 20th Division, for the purpose detailed in para. 4 (*e*), and one troop at the disposal of the G.O.C., 6th Division, in order to keep in touch with the 29th Division. Two troops are placed at the disposal of the A.P.M. for escort duty. The remainder of the Regiment is placed under the orders of the G.O.C., Lucknow Cavalry Bde., for the mission detailed in para. 10 below. The O.C., Corps Cavalry Regt. will arrange direct with Divisions as to time and place of joining.

9. After the capture of the Red Line by the 29th Division, the 5th and 2nd Cavalry Divisions will cross the Canal at Masnières and Marcoing and operate as detailed in Instruction No. 1, para. 22.[1] The 1st Cavalry Division will pass through Ribècourt and Marcoing and move Northwards.

10. In order to widen the original breach by raiding Southwards the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade and one Battery of Horse Artillery have been allotted to the III. Corps. This detachment will be reinforced by the Corps Cavalry Regt. (less 5 troops). The Lucknow Cavalry Bde. will move forward on Z-Day with the 2nd Cavalry Division to its assembly place, and on to the Canal, crossing East of or at Masnières in accordance with the local

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

tactical situation. Detailed instructions regarding the action of this detachment will be issued separately.

11. Instructions regarding the repair of roads have already been issued.

In addition to the tasks already allotted, the 6th Division Pioneers will be responsible for making the road from Ribécourt to Marcoing passable for Cavalry. This work is most urgent, and must take precedence of all other tasks. The 6th Division Pioneers will be assisted in this by 12 wire-pulling tanks, which will be employed in the first instance by the IV. Corps on clearing the wire from the Trescault-Ribécourt road.

The 29th Division Pioneers will be employed under the orders of the C.E. on the construction of a tramway from Gouzeaucourt to connect up with the German System near la Vacquerie.

12. A contact Aeroplane will fly over the Corps front at :—

Zero plus 45 minutes ;
Zero plus 2 hrs. and 15 mins. ;
Zero plus 3 hours ;
Zero plus 3 hrs. and 30 mins. ;

and subsequently as ordered.

13. Watches will be synchronized by a Staff Officer from Corps Headquarters at 9 a.m. and 12 noon on " Y " day.

14. Corps Headquarters will remain at Templeux-la-Fosse.

Divisions must be prepared to move their Headquarters forward, if the operations on Z-day are successful.

The first move of Corps H.Q. will probably be to Sorel.

15. Acknowledge.

C. G. FULLER,
Brigadier-General,
General Staff,
III. Corps.

16.11.17.

Issued by D.R. at 3 p.m.

NOTE. In addition III. Corps issued the following " Instructions " with copious amendments :

1. General Scheme of the Offensive (10th Nov.).
2. Concentration and Assembly (10th Nov.).
3. Secrecy (11th Nov.).
4. Preliminary Movements (14th Nov.).
5. Issue and Distribution of Orders (12th Nov.).
6. Codes and Ciphers (14th Nov.).
7 and 8. Signal Communications (14th and 16th Nov.).
9. Third Stage of Attack (17th Nov.).
10. Lucknow Cavalry Brigade (17th Nov.).

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 4

CAMBRAI 1917

IV. CORPS ORDER No. 320[1]

Information.

1. The dispositions of the enemy on IV. Corps front so far as can be ascertained are as shown on attached Map A.[2]

Intention.

2. The IV Corps will attack the German line between the Trescault—Ribécourt Road and the German trenches immediately W. of the Canal du Nord, with III. Corps attacking on its right and the VI. Corps attacking on its left. The objectives of the first stage and Divisional Boundaries are shewn on Map B.[2]

The intentions as regards further objectives have been issued separately.

The essence of the operation is secrecy and speed.

The vital importance of secrecy must be impressed on all to whom it is necessary to communicate orders, and the most scrupulous care must be taken of all documents and maps.

When the attack begins every minute is of importance, and once the enemy is on the run every man must put forth his utmost effort to press on and prevent his rallying.

Conduct of the attack.

3. (*a*) The attack will be carried out with the aid of Tanks and there will be no preliminary bombardment. The Barrage will lift from point to point, but being unregistered cannot be expected to be as accurate as usual.

Artillery and Machine Gun instructions and Barrage maps will be issued separately.

(*b*) The Tanks will be formed up at least one hour before Zero on a line 1,000 yards from the German outpost line.

(*c*) The infantry will be assembled either in our front Trench or behind the Tanks as may best suit the ground, at the discretion of Divisional Commanders. The most careful precautions will be taken to ensure the infantry joining their own Tank. Infantry liaison men will be attached to the Tanks. Routes and assembly places will be reconnoitred by day and night, and taped out.

[1] See Sketches 1 and 3.
[2] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

Conduct of the attack—*continued*

(*d*) Zero will be the time at which the artillery opens. No gun or trench mortar will fire before this hour.

(*e*) The Tanks will leave the 1,000 yards line at such a time as will bring them to the neighbourhood of our front line at Zero.

(*f*) The outpost line will be dealt with by Trench Mortars and Lewis guns. The Barrage of H.E., shrapnel and smoke will open on the front Trench of the Hindenburg line, off which it has been timed to lift when the leading Tanks are about 500 yards distant.

(*g*) No pause will be made on the outpost line, but strong mopping up parties will be left to deal with the troops in it.

(*h*) The attack will be carried out on the leap-frog system.

The infantry must co-operate closely with the Tanks in overpowering the enemy's resistance.

They must be prepared to supplement the covering fire of the Tanks. If a Tank breaks down the Infantry with it must join the neighbouring troops and press on to the next objective, working in from the flanks when they reach it, to fill the gap.

They must be prepared to help the Tanks when in difficulties by making causeways for them with shovels.

The mopping up must be most thorough, to enable our troops to leave the captured trenches and move forward when the situation demands.

"P" Bombs will only be used for the dug-outs in the last resort, as they set them on fire, and deprive us of their use.

(*j*) Divisions will arrange for liaison with neighbouring Divisions at selected points of the advance.

Allotment of Tanks.

4. D Battalion Tank Corps and 2 Companies E Battn. are allotted to 51st Division.

G Battalion and 1 Company E Battalion to 62nd Division.

Digitized by Google

Allotment of Corps Mounted Troops.

5. 1 Squadron K.E.H. and IV. Corps Cyclists are allotted to 51st Division.

2 Squadrons K.E.H. to 62nd Division.

Divisions will make their own arrangements to concentrate them well forward on Z morning.

Preparation of our front Trenches.

6. The O.C. 1st Tank Brigade will inform Divisional Commanders of the preparations he wishes them to make to assist the Tanks in getting over our own Trenches.

Trench ladders will not be used, but Infantry will improvise their own means of getting out of our trenches.

Opening up road Communication.

7. (*a*) The success of the later operations depends largely on the completeness of the arrangements for opening and controlling communications.

(*b*) Roads and tracks up to our front line will be prepared before Zero as completely as concealment permits.

(*c*) Artillery, Infantry and Tank tracks will be clearly marked with Notice Boards, and sign boards will be prepared beforehand for road junctions on the other side of the German line.

(*d*) Separate instructions have been issued as to the numbers required for clearing and making roads, and as to the responsibility for working on them. Map B[1] shows the tracks and roads it is intended to clear, and the purposes for which they are to be got ready.

(*e*) The general principle is that roads will first be cleared so as to be passable for guns and limbered G.S. wagons. They will be prepared for general traffic as soon as this has been done.

(*f*) Divisions will arrange for the working parties to follow closely the Infantry detailed for the attack on the Brown Line.

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

Opening up road Communication—*continued*

(*g*) During the first stage :—

Routes[1] b and c are allotted to 51st Division.

Routes c, d, and f are allotted to 62nd Division.

Subsequently roads will be allotted for general traffic according to their conditions.

(*h*) Arrangements must be made to report quickly from time to time the state of progress on each route and IV. Corps H.Q. will be kept informed of it.

(*i*) Divisions will station parties of men with drag ropes at trench crossings and other difficult spots to help guns and vehicles.

(*j*) The most careful traffic control arrangements must be made where routes cross the Trench lines.

Advance of the Cavalry.

8. (*a*) The 1st Cavalry Division which is attached to IV. Corps will pass through along the Trescault—Ribécourt road as soon as it is clear. They will move from Equancourt [5 miles W.S.W. of Gouzeaucourt], where Divl. Headquarters will be established at Zero + 2½ hours. The above road will be reserved for the Cavalry till 1st Cavalry Division has passed. After this it will be at the disposal of IV. Corps.

(*b*) During Z night 3rd Cavalry Division will be passing along it. Notice will be given of the time, and the road will be cleared for it.

(*c*) The Role of the 1st Cavalry Division will be to pass round Bourlon Wood by the East, capture the village, leave a garrison in it, and go on to seize the passages of the Canal du Nord between Palluel and Sains-les-Marquion.[2]

It will send a detachment to the neighbourhood of Sailly and Tilloy to isolate Cambrai from the North and join hands with the Cavalry Corps.

Advance of the Artillery.

9. After the capture of the Brown Line 4 Brigades of Field Artillery, one Battery of 60 pdr. guns and one Battery of Horsed 6-in. Hows. will be placed under the order of

[1] On Map B, not reproduced.

[2] See Sketch 1.

Digitized by Google

Advance of the Artillery—*continued*

each of the 36th, 51st and 62nd Divisions, who will order them forward.

As the Heavy Artillery finish their tasks they will be moved either forward East of the Canal, or to the area Demicourt—Hermies —Morchies—so as to have as many guns in action on Z + 1 day as possible.

The G.O.C.R.A. will consult the General Staff before actually ordering the move of Heavy Batteries, so as not to clash with the move of other troops.

Reallotment of Machine Guns.

10. Machine guns employed on the barrage, as soon as they have finished their tasks, will revert to the control of their Divisions.

Infantry Reserves.

11. Infantry Reserves and troops which have been employed in the capture of the earlier objectives will be kept moving forward as close up to the fighting lines as circumstances permit—so that Divisions may be concentrated well forward when the troops settle down for the night.

Reorganization of Tanks.

12. Tanks will be reorganized and replenished, so that they can continue the advance next day. The O.C. 1st Tank Brigade will be prepared to move a company to the West side of the Canal if required.

Method of dealing with captured guns.

13. If any hostile guns are captured, the nearest Brigade of R.F.A. will be informed, the report stating whether there is any ammunition or not. Divisions will make arrangements to work the guns with the personnel of their Medium and Heavy Trench Mortar Batteries. If there is no ammunition they will be brought behind the Hindenburg support system.

Anti-Aircraft Machine Guns.

14. From W day on, Divisions will arrange for Anti-Aircraft Lewis and Machine gun defence in depth. They will also take forward with them Anti-Aircraft Lewis and Machine Guns to deal with low flying aeroplanes.

Flying Corps.

15. (*a*) No. 15 Squadron R.F.C. will work with 1st Cavalry Division as well as the other troops of the Corps.

(*b*) Contact Planes will call for flares on the Blue and Brown Lines at about Zero + 130 and Zero + 220, also at intervals throughout the day. When the machine sounds a Klaxon

Digitized by Google

Flying Corps—*continued*

Horn and fires a Very light Infantry or Cavalry will at once light one flare per section.

(*c*) Counter-attack planes will specially watch the rest billets of the German reserve Battalions, and send Zone calls if they see the troops assembling or moving forward.

(*d*) Aeroplane report centres will be established in the neighbourhood of Trescault for all Infantry Brigades and between Neuville and Ytres for Divisions. Personnel will be found from Corps Troops. The exact sites will be notified later.

(*e*) Kite balloons in addition to their ordinary duties will watch for and report the movements of our own troops and the enemy.

Signals.

16. Instructions with regard to intercommunication are being issued separately by A.D.A.S. to O.C. Signals of Divisions.

Synchronization of watches.

17. Instructions on the synchronization of watches are being issued separately.

S.O.S.

18. The S.O.S. signal is a rifle grenade bursting into coloured lights.

IV Corps	..	2 Red and 2 White
V Corps	..	Red and 2 White
III Corps	..	2 Green and 2 White
VI Corps	..	2 Red and 2 Green
Cavalry	...	Green 1" Very light

The lengthen range signal IV. Corps will be 3 Very lights white, red, white fired in quick succession. It will mean lift barrage or start rolling barrage forward.

Headquarters.

19. During the First Stage IV. Corps Headquarters will remain at Villers-au-Flos.

H. De Pree,
Brigadier-General,
General Staff, IV. Corps.

H.Q., IV. Corps.
15th Nov., 1917.

NOTE: IV. Corps issued many instructions regarding preliminary movements and preparations. A "draft scheme of "operations" was sent out on 31st Oct., and another for the "second stage", that is the advance from the second objective, on 8th Nov. This was succeeded by yet another on 14th Nov. Instructions regarding the advance W. of the Canal du Nord were issued on 18th Nov.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 5

CAMBRAI 1917

NOTES ON THE USE OF TANKS WITH CAVALRY

(Issued by Cavalry Corps, 10th Nov.)

1. The sphere of activity and the radius of the tank is limited and the pace of advance is slow. These are the main disadvantages.

2. On the other hand, the tank can break through wire, move into villages held by Machine Guns and sit on strong points held.

3. Its use to Cavalry advancing is very great, but in legislating for Cavalry action supported by tanks the following points must be borne in mind.

(*a*) Tanks work in sections of 3 tanks.

(*b*) They must be given definite objectives, and successive waves of tanks must be used, instead of giving tanks successive objectives.

(*c*) Cavalry must not wait for tanks, but must push on. On the other hand, if held up, the arrival of tanks will be of the utmost use.

(*d*) Tanks should be used as pivots for the Cavalry. They are really moving Machine Guns heavily armed, and though they have not the pace of Armoured Motors they should be used on the same principle.

(*e*) Therefore Cavalry use their mobility to get round the flanks of every village or position held by the enemy, whilst the tanks move straight on it.

4. Attention is drawn to the Training Note on Tanks which has been issued to all concerned.

APPENDIX 6A

CAMBRAI 1917

THIRD ARMY ARTILLERY INSTRUCTIONS No. 18[1]

1. Essential features of the Operation.

The essence of the operation is surprise. Every possible measure must therefore be taken to conceal the preparation of positions and accumulation of ammunition.

The amount of fire on the front prior to "Z" Day will be *absolutely* restricted to the normal daily average of the past three months.

[1] As amended on 5th and 11th Nov., 1917.

Digitized by Google

No firing by natures heavier than those that have been continually in position on this front will be permitted.

It follows that camouflage, preparation of battery boards, and calibration of guns, assume great importance.

2. Camouflage.

The erection of camouflage to hide work and tracks must be taken in hand forthwith before any other work.

Requirements in material should be notified to Corps Camouflage officers with the least possible delay. Officers and N.C.Os. should be sent to the Corps Camouflage depots to inspect the various types of camouflage available and to receive instruction in their proper erection.

Movement where and when detection by the enemy is possible, must be reduced to an absolute minimum.

3. Battery Boards.

Battery positions must be selected and *the sites marked* with pegs so that the preparation of battery boards may be put in hand without delay.

The positions marked should include not only those for occupation at the commencement of the operation but also those positions close to our present front line, to which it is intended to move batteries during the progress of operations.

It is essential that batteries should occupy the exact sites which have been selected and surveyed, if this is not done the utility of the boards is almost entirely lost.

4. Calibration of Guns and Grouping according to Wear.

As much calibration of guns and howitzers as is possible *without increasing the volume of Artillery fire* should be carried out in the line, with the aid of the Observation Groups and Sound Ranging Sections. Units moving to III. and IV. Corps from other Corps within Third Army must have the calibration of their pieces checked before moving.

In addition calibration will be carried out by III. Corps on their range near Quinconce, and the Army range at Fricourt will be placed at disposal of IV. Corps for this purpose.

Assistance will also be given to III. Corps on the Army range if required.

Arrangements regarding the use of the Army range will be made with H.Q., R.A., Third Army.

Guns and howitzers should be grouped in batteries according to wear and loss of M.V., as determined by examinations by I's.O.M. and the result of calibration shoots.

Digitized by Google

5. Considerations affecting selection and preparation of positions.

The scheme is based upon the attainment of a rapid break through without a pause.

The artillery must therefore be disposed to cover the whole operation of penetrating the hostile trench system with the minimum of forward movement.

This necessitates the most forward possible positions being selected for all natures especially 60-pdrs. As no fire will take place from these positions before Zero hour the danger of disclosure to the enemy will be considerably reduced.

The protection of the flanks of the attack from counter-attack will be of great importance, as the attack proceeds it will be necessary therefore to push forward field batteries rapidly to positions from which an enfilade protective barrage can be established.

The Heavy and Siege Artillery must be placed sufficiently far forward to deal at Zero hour with the whole of the known hostile gun positions bearing on the front of attack.

Weather-proof shelter for ammunition and personnel, and slit trenches for the protection of personnel is probably all the work that will be possible to complete in the time at disposal.

In the case of R.H.A. batteries temporarily allotted to III. and IV. Corps, special consideration must be given to facilities for rapid advance. For this reason these batteries should not be placed too far forward in the preliminary arrangement of the Artillery at disposal.

Camouflage and cover for ammunition must be prepared at such forward positions as it is proposed to occupy during the earlier moves of batteries. Dumps of ammunition will have to be formed at such positions in anticipation of occupation.

The most completely sound-proof protection possible must be provided for wireless operators and battery command posts.

The positions of Brigade and Group Headquarters must be selected early and not changed or the provision of the necessary telephonic communication is rendered very difficult.

The selection of battery positions must not be arbitrarily fixed by Corps boundaries. If Corps are unable to adjust their requirements mutually the matter should be referred for Army decision. The requirements of the Tank Corps must be considered. A representative of the Tank Corps will be attached to III. and IV. Corps H.Q. and this officer should be kept informed of the proposals for placing the Artillery.

Digitized by Google

6. Communications and O.Ps.

The selection and allotment of suitable and sufficient O.Ps. for the reinforcing batteries will require immediate attention.

Likely positions for O.Ps. beyond the hostile front trenches must be selected from the map as it will be necessary to push forward Artillery observers very rapidly.

The question of the augmentation and improvement of telephonic communications should be considered with A.D. Signals of Corps. Points to be attended to were dealt with in Third Army letter No. R.A. 2510 of 4.10.17 addressed to G.O's.C.R.A., of each Corps.[1]

Owing to shortage of time and labour it will be absolutely necessary to concentrate on those circuits which are essential for the operation. For the same reasons and for the sake of secrecy no new trenches for burying cable will be constructed.

Very careful consideration must be given however to ensure that previously prepared air lines, or cables laid above ground, are not destroyed during the artillery concentration.

Mobile cable equipment of units must be complete.

Arrangements for visual signalling communication, probably with the Lucas lamp, must be considered and the necessary practice of signallers carried out.

7. Various tables attached.

Table "A"[2] shows a proposed distribution of Artillery resources on the Army front at Zero hour.

Table "B"[2] shows the allotment of Artillery units to III. and IV. Corps in detail and the sources from which they will be drawn.

Table "C"[2] shows the units to be detailed by VI., VII. and XVII. Corps for transfer to III. and IV. Corps. In certain cases there is no latitude for selection by Corps and in such cases the designation of units to be transferred is shown in Table "B."

VI., VII. and XVII. Corps will report to Army H.Q., and repeat to Corps concerned, the designation of other units to be transferred, so that Table "B" may be completed.

Table "D"[2] shows the number of guns available in III. and IV. Corps for the operation.

Table "E"[2] shows proposed dumps of ammunition.

8. Trench Mortars.

No special allotment of Trench Mortars has been made.

The fullest possible use will be made of all natures of mortars to bombard the hostile trenches on the immediate flanks of the attack.

---

[1] See page 328.

[2] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

Any requirements in pieces which Corps cannot meet from their present allotment should be notified to Army H.Q. without delay.

Corps will also notify Army H.Q. as soon as possible of their requirements in Trench Mortar ammunition.

9. Outline of Artillery action.

The Siege and Heavy Artillery will be employed in neutralization of hostile batteries, bombardment of O.Ps. positions of assembly, main routes of movement and of telephonic communication, rest billets, command posts. Particular attention will be paid to villages and approaches on the flanks, where troops might assemble and debouch to counter-attack.

Smoke barrages will be required from Zero hour on the following areas[1]:—

(*a*) The high ground in M.27, M.32, M.33 (sheet 57b) [Spur S.E. of Bantouzelle].

(*b*) On Spur R.28.d., R.29.c. [Spur E. of Gonnelieu], if this is not included in the attack.

(*c*) On known O.Ps. not at the time covered by the barrage.

(*d*) On the main Hindenburg Line L.32c. to the S.E. [Couillet Wood area].

(*e*) On the Havrincourt—Flesquières Spur.

The barrage covering the movement of the Tanks and Infantry will not be a creeping barrage but will lift from one Trench line to the next, or from objective to objective, as the case may be.

This barrage will consist of 13-pdr. and 18-pdr. firing Shrapnel, such 4·5″ Howrs., firing H.E. instantaneous fuze as are not required for smoke barrages, and any 6″ Howrs. that can be spared from counter-battery or bombardment also firing instantaneous fuzes.

The 6″ Howr. barrage should concentrate on known O.Ps. and machine gun emplacements and should not be placed nearer than 500 yards to the line of advancing Tanks.

It will be of special importance to deal at once by a heavy concentration with mobile anti-tank guns, or any guns moving into action in the open for the engagement of the Tanks or the infantry.

Certain Field and Heavy Batteries must be specially told off to engage immediately any counter-attacks, or bodies of hostile troops, reported by aeroplane or Kite Balloon Observers, or from terrestrial O.Ps.

[1] See Map 1.

Digitized by Google

10. Miscellaneous points.

Attention is directed to the following points which will require consideration :—

(*a*) Certain 6" Howr. batteries should be provided with teams from 60-pdr. batteries, to enable a proportion of 6" Howrs. to be advanced rapidly.

(*b*) It is a help to have parties of R.E. and infantry told off to assist batteries who are required to move forward early and rapidly, in the construction of ramps and bridges.

Drills should be carried out with any parties it is possible to detail.

The tools normally carried on battery vehicles are insufficient and should be supplemented by a special issue to batteries detailed to move early.

(*c*) R.A. officers who know the front well should be specially detailed to go round O.Ps. and point out the country to reinforcing Artillery. This is of particular importance in the case of incoming Heavy and Siege Artillery.

(*d*) The distribution of the battery personnel into proper reliefs. An unnecessary number of men at the gun position increases casualties with no corresponding increase in efficiency. Although the scheme of operations does not contemplate prolonged Artillery action, the exact duration cannot possibly be foreseen and a proper reserve of resting personnel for relief of detachment is essential.

(*e*) It is hoped to establish a forward Meteor office in each Corps area.

(*f*) Experience has shown that the control of several R.F.A. Brigades by one R.F.A. Brigade H.Q. as a group is an unsatisfactory arrangement if it can possibly be avoided.

11. Map showing distribution of Artillery.

A map showing distribution of Artillery (Brigades F.A. and H.A., batteries Heavy and Siege, and Group and Brigade H.Q.) will be forwarded to H.Q., R.A., Third Army as soon as possible.

LOUIS VAUGHAN,
Major-General,
General Staff, Third Army.

29.10.17.

Digitized by Google

TABLE "A" DISTRIBUTION OF ARTILLERY ON ARMY FRONT

Corps	H.A. Group H.Q.	60-pdrs.	6" Howrs.	6" Guns	8" Howrs.	9·2" Howrs.	Misc.	Divl. Arties.	Army Bdes. R.F.A.
XVII	2	Nil	5 Btries.	Nil	1 Bty.	1 Bty.	Nil	2	Nil
VI	1	Nil	5 Btries.	Nil	Nil	Nil	1 12" How. (R.M.)	3	Nil
IV	7	7 Btries.	15 Btries.	1	3 Btries.	3 Btries.	2 Btries. 12" How. (R.M.) 1 15" Howr. 1 9·2" Gun (R.M.)	4 Infy. 1 Cavy. 2 Bdes. R.F.A.	3
III	8	9 Btries.	15 Btries.	2	3 Btries.	4 Btries.	1 Bty. 12" Howr. (Mk. IV Tractor) 1 Bty. 12" Howr. (R.M.) 2 15" Howrs. 1 9·2" Gun (R.M.)	5 Infy. 2 Cavy.	4
VII	1	Nil	2 Btries.	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	2	

5.11.17.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 6B

CAMBRAI 1917

THIRD ARMY ARTILLERY INSTRUCTIONS No. 19[1]

1. *Artillery fire before Zero hour.*

No firing whatever will be carried out from any newly occupied position before Zero hour.

2. *Allotment of Field Howitzer Batteries to Cavalry Corps.*

Each of III. and IV. Corps will detail one 4·5″ Howitzer Battery to be attached to the Cavalry Corps as soon as the leading Cavalry Divisions advance from the line Gouzeaucourt—Metz en Couture. The batteries will each consist of 4 Guns and 8 wagons with 8-horse teams throughout.

50 per cent. of the ammunition in the echelons will be fuzed 106 fuze.

III. and IV. Corps will inform Cavalry Corps designations of units selected and positions in action.

Cavalry Corps will arrange with III. and IV. Corps when and where these batteries will actually join the Cavalry Divisions on the march.

3. *Reversion of R.H.A. Batteries to Cavalry Corps control.*

The R.H.A. Batteries of 2nd, 4th and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, allotted to III. and IV. Corps respectively in the preliminary distribution given in table "B"[2] dated 5.11.17 attached to Third Army Artillery Instructions No. 18, will again be at the disposal of the Cavalry Corps as soon as the leading Cavalry Divisions advance from the line Gouzeaucourt—Metz en Couture.

The III. and IV. Corps will not move these batteries from the position in which they commence the action without reference to the Cavalry Corps.

4. *Artillery Liaison Officers with Infantry formations, etc.*

A Field Artillery Liaison Officer will be detailed to accompany each Infantry Brigade Headquarters participating in the attack.

He must be aware of all the Artillery dispositions which may affect the Infantry unit to which he is attached.

A Senior Heavy Artillery Officer (Group or Battery Commander) will also be detailed to accompany Divisional Headquarters. This officer will act as a Liaison Officer from the Corps Heavy Artillery and will be prepared to offer suggestions as to suitable objectives for engagement by the Siege and Heavy Artillery, and will also give any information required by Divisional Headquarters as to the number and nature of Heavy Guns and

[1] See Map 1.

[2] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

Siege Howitzers that can be expected to be able to fire effectively on any objective which it is desired to engage.

Corps will detail such other Artillery officers as are deemed necessary for the special mission of watching the progress of the Infantry and keeping Artillery Commanders informed of the tactical situation.

Artillery Liaison Officers must join the formation to which they are attached at least 24 hours before Zero.

It must be remembered that the ability to concentrate Artillery fire rapidly on troops massing for counter-attack, or on hostile batteries which are checking the advance of the Tanks and Infantry, will be essential to success.

5. *Allotment of an additional* 4.5″ *Howr. Battery to III. Corps from IV. Corps.*

IV. Corps will place one 4·5″ Howr. Battery at disposal of III. Corps for the special purpose of assisting in the formation of a smoke barrage about Premy Chapel.

This battery may be the battery detailed to accompany the Cavalry according to Section 2.

6. *Rates of Fire.*

For continuous bombardment, unless otherwise ordered (including "protective" barrages).

18-pdrs. or 4·5″ Howrs. — 3 rounds per battery per minute or 1 round per gun per 2 minutes.

6″ Howrs. — 1 round per battery per ¾ minute or 1 round per howitzer per 3 minutes.

8″ or 9·2″ Howrs. — 1 round per battery per 1¼ minutes or 1 round per howitzer per 5 minutes.

For counter-battery work.

The rate of fire must be decided according to the circumstances of each case.

For super-heavy Howitzers and Medium and Heavy Guns.

The rate of fire must be decided according to the circumstances of each case.

For barrage fire (including "creeping" and "standing" barrages but not "protective" barrages).

18-pdr. — 2 rounds per gun per minute up to 4 rounds per gun per minute, but latter rate is not to be maintained for more than 10 minutes.

4·5″ Howr. — 1 round per gun per minute.

6″ Howr. — 1 round per gun per 2 minutes.

7. *Records of Tasks.*

Battery Commanders and F.O.O's. must have a record of the tasks to be carried out by their battery, together with all necessary orders, in a notebook on their person.

Digitized by Google

8. *Anti-aircraft Arrangements.*

The attached map[1] shows the scheme of anti-aircraft defence at Zero hour.

The first moves proposed are also shown, these will take place by Decauville Railway.

No anti-aircraft lorries will cross our present front line without orders from H.Q., R.A., Third Army, and such orders will not be given until it is clear that the condition of the roads is satisfactory.

9. *Table of Moves, etc.*

A Table of moves must be drawn up for all Artillery units until the line Masnières—Marcoing—Premy Chapel—Flesquières has been captured. This table must show designations of units, lines of advance, tasks, probable O.P.'s and approximate position to be occupied.

The preparation of routes across the wire must be put in hand at the earliest possible moment. The arrangements for bringing up the gun teams and ammunition wagons of batteries detailed to move must be carefully worked out in order to avoid delay.

Officers frequently find difficulty in fixing their own battery positions on the map after advancing across the hostile trenches, this must be considered and suitable points from which to resect decided upon beforehand. In determination of the position from detail on the map, the $\frac{1}{10,000}$ scale map will give much more accurate results than the $\frac{1}{20,000}$.

10. *Maintenance of Dumps and clearance of positions after the attack, etc.*

(*a*) " Dumps " will be maintained after Zero hour at the following figures per piece :—

	At Guns	*In Corps Reserve*
18-pdr.	100	100
4·5" Howr.	100	50
60-pdr.	100	50
6" Howr.	100	50
6" Gun	100	50
8" Howr.	75	25
9·2" Howr.	75	25
12" Howr.	50	—
15" Howr.	—	—

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

(*b*) In the event of the operation being completely successful the Army will be responsible for issuing orders regarding the clearance of any ammunition left behind in vacated battery positions.

If however the operations are only partially successful Corps must make every endeavour to utilize ammunition left at vacated battery positions to avoid pressure on the main lines of railway.

(*c*) In addition to Corps Reserve and Gun Dumps it is hoped to hold the following stock of ammunition at Army Railheads for III. and IV. Corps at Zero hour.

18-pdr. . .	. .	. .	. .	100	rounds per gun
4·5″ Howr.	. .	. .	. .	100	,, ,, ,,
60-pdr. . .	. .	. .	. .	100	,, ,, ,,
6″ Howr.	. .	. .	. .	100	,, ,, ,,
6″ Gun . .	. .	. .	. .	100	,, ,, ,,
8″ Howr.	. .	. .	. .	100	,, ,, ,,
9·2″ Howr.	. .	. .	. .	100	,, ,, ,,
12″ Howr.	. .	. .	. .	50	,, ,, ,,

11. *Collection of information regarding the Hostile Artillery.*

Great reliance is now placed on the Observation Groups and Sound Ranging Sections of the Field Survey Company for the collection of information regarding the hostile Artillery.

After a successful attack some time must elapse before these organizations can be re-established and during this period it is most important that Artillery Observation officers should realize that the responsibility for locating the positions of the hostile batteries devolves very largely upon them.

12. *Co-operation with R.F.C.*

Corps Squadrons will require a programme of the neutralizing fire it is proposed to carry out so that fire may if necessary be corrected.

Beyond this the R.F.C. work will consist of reporting hostile batteries that are active and observing and correcting our fire upon them, and in calling for fire on concentrations of hostile troops.

Slow and deliberately observed counter-battery shoots for destructive effect will not be attempted.

A Kite Balloon will ascend at as close a range as possible in each Corps area. These Balloons must be especially used for reporting and engaging hostile troops concentrating or in movement. Speed and a heavy concentration of fire will be important and direct telephonic connection to a selected Heavy Artillery Group will probably be the best arrangement.

Digitized by Google

13. *Action after the 1st stage is completed.*

(*a*) A Heavy Artillery Group consisting of one 60-pdr. battery and one 6″ Howitzer Battery under a Group Headquarters should be allotted to each of the leading Divisions.

Arrangements should be made within Corps to provide the 6″ Howitzer Battery detailed with horse draught from one of the Heavy Batteries.

(*b*) On Z + 1 day it will probably be necessary for the 40th Divisional Artillery to rejoin its division with the V. Corps.

(*c*) On Z/Z + 1 night at least two 12″ Howitzers (Railway Mounting) from Vélu [5 m. W. of Havrincourt] and possibly also one 9·2″ Gun (Railway Mounting) will be moved round to Vaulx Vraucourt [8 m. N.W. of Havrincourt].

(*d*) On Z + 1 day the VI. Corps will probably be called upon to assist IV. Corps by the bombardment of Quéant and Pronville [1 mile S.E. of Quéant].

(*e*) The following points are drawn attention to, being lessons drawn from the advance in the Bapaume area during March 1917.

(i) Until the roads have been thoroughly repaired, it is not advisable to push forward many heavy Siege Howitzers and Heavy Guns.

Even if the pieces themselves are got forward it is impossible to maintain the ammunition supply.

On the other hand a single 9·2″ or 8″ Howr. and a single 6″ Gun will prove invaluable, and a fair chance exists of maintaining a sufficient supply of ammunition for a small number of pieces.

One Heavy Howitzer will frequently be the quickest, and will always be the least expensive way of expelling the enemy from a village or hastily prepared strong point which cannot be passed by.

(ii) Battery Commanders having become accustomed to very detailed orders and instructions and to the stagnation of trench warfare do not realize the necessity for resolute initiative and speedy action.

The drill of batteries too is slow.

All ranks must realize that speed and vigour are essential to attain complete success.

(iii) The necessity of appointing a Commander of the Artillery of any detached force is not always realized. If this is not done any attached Heavy Artillery are sometimes left without orders.

This Commander must be given an adequate staff and suitable communication facilities.

60-pdrs. and 6″ Howrs. should always form part of an advanced guard of any size.

Digitized by Google

(iv) As soon as a check occurs and an organized Artillery action becomes necessary it is essential for the Corps to resume close tactical control without delay. The Corps Heavy Artillery Commander and his Staff must keep in close personal touch with the progress of mobile operations so as to be in a position to take over immediate tactical control of the Heavy Artillery.

LOUIS VAUGHAN,
Major-General,
10.11.17. General Staff, Third Army.

APPENDIX 6C

CAMBRÁI 1917

THIRD ARMY ARTILLERY INSTRUCTIONS No. 20[1]

The action of the Artillery on the day of attack will be based on the following instructions :—

1. All Guns, Howitzers, and Trench Mortars in III. and IV. Corps will open fire on their respective tasks at Zero hour.

Before Zero hour the normal night firing programme will be carried out. It is necessary that there should be no increase of fire, and it is almost equally important that the night should not be abnormally quiet.

At Zero hour the leading echelon of Tanks will cross a line approximately parallel to the First Artillery barrage line and about 800 yards away from it. The exact distance will vary according to the nature and slope of the ground and will be adjusted within Corps.

2. 442*nd Siege Battery* (9·2″ Gun Rly. Mtg.)[2]

Both Guns	.. ..	Target (*a*) Sailly [map co-ordinates given]. Resting battalion. 25 rounds a gun. 50 rounds in all.
One Gun	.. ..	Target (*b*) Haynecourt [map co-ordinates given]. Resting battalion. 50 rounds.
One Gun	.. ..	Target (*c*) Billets in the barracks at A.17.a.65.45. [in Cambrai]. 50 rounds.

At all above places resting battalions are billeted. Target (*a*) will be engaged by both guns at the same time, and will be engaged first.

Fire will be opened at Zero hour by both Guns.

[1] As amended on 15th and 18th Nov., 1917.
[2] See Sketch 1.

Digitized by Google

Further tasks may subsequently be ordered by the Army according to the progress of operations, but, in the event of no further tasks being ordered, Corps will be at liberty to issue orders to these guns direct, informing H.Q., R.A., Third Army of the action taken.

Corps will be responsible for arranging aeroplane observation for ranging on the targets allotted, if such observation is possible, but it is to be clearly understood that the carrying out of the programme is not to be delayed or abandoned on account of inability to obtain aeroplane observation.

3. The following objective should be engaged by the long range guns and long range howitzers of Corps at Zero hour.

III. Corps[1]

(*a*) Les Rues des Vignes apparently much used as a billet. Special attention should be paid to the neighbourhood of the locks and bridges. Resting battalion here [map co-ordinates given].

(*b*) Crevècoeur the buildings about [map co-ordinates given] appear to be of the most importance. Resting battalion here.

(*c*) Masnières with special attention to the Station and the buildings about [map co-ordinates given]. Care to be taken to safeguard the bridge on the Bonavis—Masnières Road. 106 Fuze to be used by Howitzers. Resting battalion here.

(*d*) Rumilly. Southern half of the town seems to be of the greater importance. Resting battalion here.

(*e*) Marcoing and Marcoing Station. It is most important not to damage the road bridge and lock and also the railway bridge. 106 Fuze to be used by Howitzers. Regimental H.Q. and Resting battalion at [map co-ordinates given].

IV. Corps[2]

(*f*) Noyelles Sur L'Escaut. Battalion H.Q. and Resting Battalion [map co-ordinates given].

(*g*) Cantaing Billets. Resting Battalion [map co-ordinates given].

(*h*) Nine Wood. Dug-outs in Quarry L.16.a.5.4. [S.W. of wood].

(*k*) Fontaine Notre Dame. Regimental H.Q. Probable billets [map co-ordinates given].

(*l*) Bourlon Billets [map co-ordinates given].

---

[1] See Sketch 2.
[2] See Sketch 3.

Digitized by Google

Fire will be maintained on Marcoing and Masnières throughout the operation until the approach of the Infantry or Tanks renders it necessary to lift or switch fire from these objectives.

In other cases fire will be readjusted by Corps according to the tactical information in their possession.

4. At Zero hour as heavy a concentration as possible will be opened by all Siege Howitzers, less those required for barrage or for bombardment of the trenches on the flanks of the attack, on all known or suspected billets, H.Qs., communication centres, O.Ps., and command posts.

At this stage the 60-pdr. batteries will open neutralizing fire on hostile battery positions known to be occupied, with Lachrymatory shell. This distribution of fire will subsequently be adjusted by Corps according to the activity and effect of the hostile Artillery.

The fire of the 60-pdr. batteries, using shrapnel, will gradually be turned on to the probable lines of approach and positions of assembly of the hostile infantry and the task of neutralization will then fall more to the Siege Howitzers.

5. Attention is directed to the importance of maintaining the following areas under fire until, in certain cases, the approach of our own troops renders this unsafe.

III. Corps[1]

Banteux, and Bantouzelle, Pont la Grenouillere [where St. Quentin road crosses canal], Vaucelles, and the bridge and locks in M.15.c. [at Vaucelles].

These places must be kept under fire with Siege Howitzers, using the authorized proportion of instantaneous fuzes, until the right flank of the attack to Lateau Wood and thence towards Masnières is securely established.

IV. Corps[2]

Havrincourt and Flesquières

These places must be maintained under a heavy fire from Siege Howitzers, using the authorized proportion of instantaneous fuzes, until the proximity of our own troops renders it unsafe to continue.

6. In addition, it will be necessary to bombard heavily the hostile front system of trenches for at least 500 yards on the immediate flanks of the attack.

For this purpose Trench Mortars must be utilized to the utmost extent possible in order to release all possible Siege Howitzers for tasks at longer ranges.

[1] See Sketch 2.
[2] See Sketch 3.

Digitized by Google

7. As regards other points not specially mentioned in para. 5. Corps will be responsible for arranging the bombardment within their own allotted areas as shown on the accompanying map.[1]

8. At Zero hour the Artillery barrage, including special standing barrages of smoke, will be opened as shown on the accompanying map, and according to the following instructions :—

(*a*) The rates of fire laid down for " Creeping " and " Standing " barrages, in Third Army Artillery Instructions No. 19, Section 6, will be adhered to during those periods in which the Tanks and Infantry are actually progressing between their various objective lines.

During periods of consolidation the rate of fire should be reduced to the bombardment rates laid down in the same section.

It may, however, be necessary to increase this rate on certain known machine gun localities or strong points, or for the formation of special smoke screens. This must be decided by Corps according to the circumstances of each case, or according to reports received at the time.

(*b*) At Zero hour, and subsequently at Z+150 minutes, all Artillery employed on the frontal barrage will fire a salvo of one round smoke shell. Natures not provided with smoke shell will use shrapnel, or H.E. if also unprovided with shrapnel.

In the event of the order " fire no smoke " (see sub-para. (*d*) below) being issued, the salvo at Zero hour will, as far as possible, consist of shrapnel.

Under the same circumstances (*i.e.*, no Smoke in frontal barrage) all 13-pdrs., 18-pdrs. and 4·5″ Howrs. employed in the frontal barrage will fire from +150 to +153 at the rate of 3 rounds per gun per minute, Shrapnel to be used by 13-pdrs., 106 Fuzes by 4·5″ Howrs.

(*c*) The ammunition fired in the 13-pdr. and 18-pdr. frontal barrage will be ⅛ Shrapnel (long corrector 50 per cent. graze), ⅛ H.E. and ⅛ Smoke. H.E. with delay fuzes will be expended at the shorter ranges, at ranges over 3,500 yards on level ground non-delay fuzes must be used. If firing *against* a slope H.E. with delay fuze will not ricochet at shorter ranges even than this, and non-delay fuzes should then be used.

(*d*) The amount of smoke to be fired is calculated on the assumption that the conditions are most favourable (*i.e.*, wind S.W. 10 to 15 m.p.h.).

A wire will be despatched from Army Headquarters to Corps at 12 midnight Y/Z in the following form :—" Fire " full ration," " fire half ration," " fire no Smoke," etc., this

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

will indicate that the amount of Smoke to be fired in *the frontal barrages* should be reduced accordingly.

The wire from Army Headquarters will be based on a forecast of probable weather conditions.

When conditions are uncertain, and when variable weather, visibility, and wind currents are likely in small areas, the conditions most unfavourable to the use of smoke will be assumed to be universal and to be most probable, and the Army order will refer to such conditions.

It will be permissible for Corps to increase the proportion of Smoke beyond that ordered, *up to the full ration only*, according to the local conditions, and as these conditions change during the course of the operation.

Corps may delegate this authority to Divisions if considered desirable.

Under certain conditions it may also be desirable to order no smoke to be fired on any barrages West or South of the Blue line, while East or North of this line a certain proportion will be fired, and Corps must be prepared for such order.

As regards the standing smoke barrages Corps will be responsible for issuing instructions as to the rate and duration of the fire according to the meteorological conditions at the moment.

Attention is directed to Third Army "Notes on Smoke "Barrages"[1] as regards placing of the M.P.I., and rate of fire required for the formation of Smoke screens.

(*e*) The M.P.I. of the whole barrage will be kept on the barrage line. That is to say the point of ricochet and not the point of burst of 18-pdr. H.E. (delay fuze) will be on the barrage line; and smoke shell in this case will also be placed on, and not short of, the line to be barraged. This is necessary in order to reduce to a minimum the danger of a direct hit on a tank from short rounds.

(*f*) All 13-pdr. and 18-pdr. Guns will be employed in the frontal barrage preceding the Tanks and Infantry save certain 18-pdr. batteries in IV. Corps necessarily employed in the formation of a flank barrage.

Such 4·5″ Howitzers as are not required for formation of Smoke barrages or other special tasks will join in the frontal barrage.

In addition any 6″ Howitzers not required for the tasks specified in Sections 3, 4 and 5, will also join in the frontal barrage but will not fire within 500 yards of the projected leading line of Tanks.

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

Howitzers will use the largest possible proportion of 106 Fuze, and their fire will be concentrated on particularly important machine gun nests, O.Ps. and communication trenches.

9. Care will be necessary to ensure that the advance of the Cavalry is not delayed or hampered by tardiness in lifting or switching fire from points in their line of advance.

10. A special Artillery weather wire will be sent out from Army Headquarters at Zero—2 hours.

During Z-day Artillery weather wires will be sent out from Army Headquarters at 2-hour intervals.

LOUIS VAUGHAN,
Major-General,
14.11.17. General Staff, Third Army

APPENDIX 7

CAMBRAI 1917

3RD BRIGADE TANK CORPS
ORDER No. 8[1]

1. INTENTION

The intention of the III. Corps is to break the enemy's defensive system by a coup de main, between the Canal de l'Escaut at Banteux and the Canal du Nord, West of Havrincourt, and to pass the Cavalry through the gap thus made, with a view to operating in a north-easterly direction.

The success of the Operations will depend on our ability to sieze the crossing over the Canal de l'Escaut at Masnières and Marcoing, break through the Masnières—Beaurevoir Line, and pass the Cavalry through before the enemy can bring up his Divisions to counter-attack or organize a new defensive system.

2. BOUNDARIES

The Divisional and Brigade boundaries and Objectives are shown on attached Tracing.[2]

3. ARTILLERY

There will be no preliminary bombardment and no wire cutting by artillery, except in one or two places, prior to Zero.

The attack will be preceded by Tanks and will be covered by Standing Barrages, which will include smoke.

[1] Includes Addenda issued 18th Nov.
[2] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

This barrage will drop on the enemy front line at Zero.

These barrages will lift from Objective to Objective as the attack progresses.

The detailed Artillery Programme will be issued later.

4. DISTRIBUTION

Tanks are allotted as follows :—

12th Division	
35th and 37th Brigades	.. " C " Battalion Tank Corps.
36th Brigade	.. " F " Battalion Tank Corps.
20th Division	
60th Brigade	.. " A " Battalion Tank Corps (less 1 Coy.).
61st Brigade	.. " I " Battalion Tank Corps.
29th Division	
1 Company " A " Battalion Tank Corps.	

5. THE ATTACK[1]

The Infantry and Tanks will form up as early as possible on Y/Z night on a line 1,000 yards from the enemy's front trenches.

Tanks and Infantry will advance to the attack at Zero *minus* 10 minutes.

The attack will be carried out as follows :—

(*a*) 12th Division

The 12th Division will attack on a two Brigade front up to the Blue Line, 35th Brigade on the Right, and 36th Brigade on the Left.

The 36th and 37th Brigades will continue the attack up to the Brown Line, the 37th Brigade carrying out the extension of the Defensive Flank.

The 37th Brigade will move West of the crest of the Gonnelieu—Bonavis Ridge to a position of assembly on the Blue Line on the right of the 36th Brigade.

Tanks will attack in two waves with the Infantry. Each Tank Battalion will have 24 Tanks in the first wave and 12 in the second.

The first wave of Tanks and Infantry will attack the Blue Line and the second wave the Brown Line.

All Tanks of the first wave when released from the Blue Line will join the second wave and attack the Brown Line.

" C " Battalion will arrange for 3 Sections to work down towards the Banteux Ravine as follows :—

(i) Along the Banteux Spur to Quarry Post.

[1] See Sketch 2.

Digitized by Google

(ii) Down the trench system running through R.23c. to R.29.b [Hindenburg front system between main road and Banteux].

(iii) Along the trench running from Lateau Wood to the Canal.

" F " Battalion will be prepared to render every assistance to " I " battalion at Vacquerie, should this place continue to hold out.

(*b*) 20th Division

The 20th Division will attack with 61st Infantry Brigade on the Right and 60th Infantry Brigade on the Left, whilst the 59th Infantry Brigade will be in Reserve, and will carry out a special role as indicated later.

The 61st Infantry Brigade will attack in three waves covered by 18, 12 and 6 Tanks respectively.

The first wave will be directed on La Vacquerie, and the system of trenches to the N.W. of it, as far as the inter-Brigade boundary.

No Tanks of the first wave will proceed beyond La Vacquerie and trenches N.W. of it until our Infantry are firmly established in this position. Three Sections (9 Tanks) of this first wave will be detailed beforehand for the special purpose of capturing and assisting in the mopping-up of La Vacquerie.

When the Infantry are established in this position, all Tanks of the first wave will advance to the Blue Line and form up for the capture of the Brown Line.

The second wave will be directed on the first objective (Blue Line), passing through the first wave (which will be on the La Vacquerie Line), without a pause.

The third wave will capture the second objective (Brown Line) assisted by the Tanks of the first wave which have been released by the capture of the La Vacquerie Line.

The 60th Infantry Brigade will attack in two waves, with 18 Tanks in the first wave and 6 Tanks in the second wave.

The first wave will push through to the first objective (Blue Line) without a halt.

When the advance is resumed to the Brown Line (i.e., second objective) all Tanks released from the first wave detailed to capture the Blue Line will continue with the second wave.

Digitized by Google

6. EXPLOITATION BEYOND BROWN LINE

Exploitation beyond the Brown Line will be carried out as follows :—

(*a*) Independent action of Tanks, without Infantry, against Masnières and Marcoing.

(*b*) Offensive action of Tanks on the Right Flank of the 20th Division.

(*c*) Offensive action of Tanks in co-operation with the Advanced Guards of the 29th Division.

(*d*) Reserve of Tanks with the Cavalry Corps.

The detail of the above operations will be carried out as follows :—

(*a*) (i) The Company of " F " Battalion detailed to operate on the Blue Line will, directly the Brown Line is captured, proceed to Masnières without waiting for Infantry support.

Any shortage of Tanks in this Company will be made good by O.C. " F " Battalion and sent on as soon as possible in support.

This Company will move at their greatest speed and make the Bridge at G.26.b.40 45 [main-road bridge] their first objective. Having seized the Bridge, the Southern, Eastern and Northern exits of Masnières will be secured. This Company will maintain its position at Masnières until relieved by 29th Division.

(ii) The Company of " A " Battalion, detailed to operate on the Blue Line, will, directly the Brown Line is captured, proceed to Marcoing, without waiting for Infantry support. Any shortage of Tanks in this Company will be made good by O.C. " A " Battalion and sent on, as soon as possible, in support.

The Objective of this Company will be to seize the Canal Crossing East of the Railway Bridge at Marcoing, and West of Masnières (both exclusive).

A Company from 2nd Brigade will hold the remainder of the Village. These Companies will hold their position at Marcoing until relieved by 29th Division.

(*b*) One Company of " I " Battalion in conjunction with 59th Brigade (20th Division) will move forward after the capture of the Brown Line and prolong the Right Flank of the III. Corps from Les Rues Vertes to M.2.d.9.7 [1,100 yards from Lateau Wood], in order to form a defensive Flank to cover the operations of the 29th Division towards Masnières and Marcoing.

The 20th Division will extend to join this line at M.2.d.9.7 [1,100 yards from Lateau Wood].

Digitized by Google

The 12th Division and two troops of the III. Corps Cavalry will establish posts along the Bon Avis Spur, between Lateau Wood and St. Waast [canal opposite Crèvecœur], so as to deny it to the enemy, and to prevent hostile observation from this spur of the passage of the 29th Division and the Cavalry across the Canal at Masnières.

One Section of " C " Battalion Tank Corps will cover this movement by pushing forward as soon as the Brown Line is captured, moving down the Spur as far as the road at G.34.d.6.0 [½ m. S. of Canal]. Tanks will not move further down into the valley than this point, but will fire from here on to any hostile troops attempting to cross the Canal or debouch from Les Rues des Vignes.

(*c*) and (*d*) Will be carried out by Tanks detached from the 2nd Brigade Tank Corps.

RALLYING

The Brigade Rallying Area will be Map Squares R.17.a. and b. [N. side of Bonavis ridge between Hindenburg front and support systems].

It is of the utmost importance that complete units—firstly complete Companies, secondly Battalions, should be reorganized at the earliest possible hour after rallying. Each Company should have its own Rallying Point and also each Battalion, and units should be re-formed before moving into the Brigade Rallying Area.

Directly re-filling and reorganization are completed, crews will be rested and held in readiness for further action. Tanks must be greased up before Crews are allowed to rest.

Reports on progress of reorganization will be submitted at 3.0 p.m. " Z " day, and 7.0 p.m. " Z " day to Brigade H.Q.

7. RE-FILLING

Battalions will arrange to have their Supply Tanks filled at the Brigade Dump at Gouzeaucourt.

In addition to battalion Supply Tanks, a G.C. Tank[1] attached to the Brigade will move straight to Brigade Re-filling Point (R.17.a.2.9) [N.W. side of Bde. Rallying Area], starting from Gouzeaucourt at Z plus 1 hour, and moving along the North side of the Gouzeaucourt—Bonavis Road. This Tank will continue to ferry Supplies backwards and forwards along this Route. Care must be taken at re-filling points to guard against over-crowding.

The first load of the G.C. Tank will consist of ½ ammunition and ½ Supplies. Battalions will send Runners to the Gouzeaucourt dump at the earliest possible moment, stating what ratio of ammunition to Supplies is required on subsequent loads.

[1] Gun-carrier tank adapted for transportation of supplies, etc.

Digitized by Google

8. " A " BATTALION

All Tanks of " A " Battalion will, on release by the 20th and 29th Divisions, rally on the 2nd Brigade " Rallying Area " at L.26 Central [Grand Ravin, E. side of Ribécourt], where they will come under the orders of the 2nd Brigade Tank Corps.

9. WIRE-PULLERS

Wire-pulling Tanks of all Battalions come under the direct orders of Major Hon. D. Bingham at 9.0 p.m. on " Y " day, by which time they will be moved, under Battalion arrangements to Q.36.a.7.8. [N.E. side of Gouzeaucourt]. These Tanks will all rally on the Brigade Rallying Area on completion of their duty, and will again come under the orders of their respective Battalions for administration. Wire-pulling Tanks are not to be used as Fighting Tanks without reference to Brigade H.Q.

10. SIGNALS

Two wireless Sets will be moved forward to the Brigade Re-filling Point.

" C " Battalion will find a spare Tank to carry one Set, and " F " Battalion the other.

All arrangements to be made between O.C. 3rd Brigade Signal Company and Battalions direct.

Each Battalion will be issued with 50 pigeons. These birds, however, must not be relied on as much as heretofore, as they are in very poor condition and badly trained. Every Section Commander should be issued with two birds, also Company Commanders and Reconnaissance Officers.

In view of the scarcity of birds, all officers who have them must be told not to release them unless they have some information to send which is important. The fact that a Tank has some mechanical trouble is not important.

No pigeons will be released until after the Blue Line has been captured.

The Tanks of " C " and " F " Battalions which are detailed to carry the Wireless Sets will be " Females." These Tanks will move forward behind the Brown Line Companies of their own Battalions timing their march so as to arrive at the Brigade Re-filling Point at Zero plus 3 hours 30 minutes.

On arrival at the Re-filling Point they will come under the direct orders of Lieut. Charlton, Brigade Wireless Officer, who will issue the necessary orders for setting up the Wireless.

When Wireless Tanks are ready to function, they will hoist a blue and white Signal flag.

Digitized by Google

11. ROUTES

The greatest care must be taken by all Tank Commanders when crossing Decauville line, pipe lines or telephone wires. Crossing places will be prepared in every case and must be used.

12. KIT

No articles of loose kit will be carried in the Tanks. Everything taken must be neatly and securely packed.

13. APPROACH MARCHES

In spite of the most careful arrangements, cases are sure to occur during the approach marches of units crossing one another or getting off their routes.

In such cases, columns must at once halt and the Senior Officer present will proceed to find out what is the matter. Confusion is only more confounded if Tank Commanders attempt to help by moving their Tanks off their routes.

Absolute silence and darkness must be maintained during approach marches. There will be no smoking or lights.

All Tanks will move very slowly in low gear whilst within 1,500 yards of the enemy.

14. FROST

As a precaution against frost, all Tanks will be started up and run for ¾ of an hour every two hours, and during this time the Tank must be moved (if possible for a distance twice the length of the Tank) to prevent tracks freezing.

15. HEADQUARTERS

All Battalion Headquarters will be at V.3.c.2.8. (Sheet 57c). [1,500 yds. W. of Equancourt.][1]

For the operation Battalion Commanders will be with the Infantry Brigades with which they are working.

3rd Brigade H.Q. will be at Templeux-la-Fosse [5½ m. S.W. of Epéhy] from 17th November.

16. REPORT CENTRE

A forward Report Centre for the Brigade will be established at Quentin Mill. [E. Side of Gouzeaucourt.]

17. COUNTER-ATTACK PLANE

An aeroplane will be up continuously from daylight onwards, whose sole mission will be to detect the approach of any enemy counter-attacks.

Whenever this plane observes hostile parties of 100 or over either assembling or moving to counter-attack, it will drop a

[1] See Sketch A.

Digitized by Google

smoke bomb over that portion of the front towards which the enemy is moving. The smoke bomb will burst about 100 feet below the machine into a white parachute flare which descends slowly leaving a trail of brown smoke about 1 ft. broad behind it.

On seeing the above signal, all disengaged Tanks in the immediate vicinity will move towards the threatened point, to meet the counter-attack. But as a general rule Tanks should not leave the area of the Infantry Brigade with whom they are operating.

18. ADVANCE OF THE CAVALRY

The following roads are reserved for the use of Cavalry, and are on no account to be used by Tanks until the Cavalry have passed through :—

(*a*) Gouzeaucourt—Barricade—La Vacquerie—R.5 Central [down valley].

(*b*) Villers Plouich—R.8.b.1.7—R.3.b.15.90 [down Couillet valley]—Marcoing.

19. Acknowledge.

L. H. Cox,
Captain,
Brigade Major,
3rd Brigade Tank Corps.

H.Q. 3rd Brigade,
Tank Corps.
15th November 1917.
Issued at 9.0 a.m.

APPENDIX 8

CAMBRAI 1917

INSTRUCTIONS TO ROYAL FLYING CORPS[1]

1. The essence of the operation is secrecy.

No attempt will therefore be made to screen movements before Z-day by having more machines on the front affected than has been the case for the past four months.

2. Our resources in fighting and reconnaissance machines will be as follows :—

7 Single-seater scout squadrons.
1 Two-seater reconnaissance squadron.
Part of 1 Two-seater bombing squadron.

[1] See Sketch 1

Digitized by Google

In addition, the Third Army will be assisted on Z-day by a G.H.Q. Squadron and part of the fighting squadrons of the First Army.

3. The fighting and reconnaissance machines will be used as follows :—

(*a*) Medium distance reconnaissance of the following points :—

(i) Roads and Railways round Cambrai.

(ii) Region East and South-East of the front of the operations.

(iii) Approaches from the North.

Special attention will be paid to (iii).

(*b*) Bombing. The following targets will be attacked :—

(i) Enemy's aerodromes opposite the Third Army front, South of the Scarpe, by scout squadrons, as soon after Zero hour as possible.

(ii) Headquarters at Caudry and Escadoeuvres [N.E. suburb of Cambrai] by machines from the Corps Squadrons of the VII. and XVII. Corps, under the orders of the R.F.C. Brigade.

(iii) Following railway junctions in order of importance :—Douai, Somain, Busigny, Le Cateau, Valenciennes.

No machine will cross the front line before Zero hour. The attacks on H.Q. will be repeated during the day.

(*c*) Ground Targets. As many squadrons as possible will be detailed for attacking ground targets, as follows :—

(i) Selected groups of batteries.

(ii) Troops, transport, etc., beyond our barrage.

(*d*) Fighting Patrols. Fighting Patrols will be kept out throughout the day, paying particular attention to the vicinity of enemy's aerodromes.

4. Hostile Balloons opposite the front of the main operation will be attacked at intervals throughout the day.

5. Aeroplane activity will be displayed on the whole front of the main and subsidiary operations up to Zero plus two hours after which time efforts will be concentrated on the front of the main operation.

LOUIS VAUGHAN,
Major-General,
General Staff, Third Army.

9th November 1917.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 9A

TRAINING NOTE

TANK AND INFANTRY OPERATIONS WITHOUT METHODICAL ARTILLERY PREPARATION[1]

1. Secrecy

This Training Note is published for general information and instructions. Its contents, however, must be kept secret, as the knowledge of the tactics laid down in it might prove of value to the enemy.

2. Infantry Tank Battle

Where surprise is essential, occasion may arise when it is advisable to launch an attack at such short notice that it is not possible to prepare it methodically by artillery; in this case it may be found feasible to use Tanks instead. Under these circumstances, no wire cutting being possible, the Tanks will have to lead the Infantry through the enemy's wire and protect them during their attack.

3. Tank Section Attack Areas

Given the objective to be attacked, the first thing to do is to divide it into a series of "Tank Section Attack Areas". These areas should generally include a tactical point, for if these are captured, it should not be difficult to clean up the trenches between them. If the objective is part of a system of trenches, the area selected should, if possible, be free of communication trenches, for if these are deep and broad the tank may experience serious trouble in crossing them.

4. Tank Echelons

The Tanks operating against each separate objective should constitute one Tank Echelon. This echelon should be divided into two waves or lines—the Advanced Tanks and the Main Body. The strength of the Advanced Tanks will vary, but normally it may be taken at one-third of the total Tanks employed against any one objective. If possible, Tank Companies should be kept intact and not split up over two or more objectives.

5. Duty of Advanced Tank

The duty of the Advanced Tank is to proceed slightly ahead of the Main Body and threaten the enemy and keep down his fire whilst the Main Body followed by the Infantry advance on and cross the enemy's wire and trenches. Once this duty is

[1] Diagrams 1, 2, 4 and 5 issued with this Note are not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

finished, the Advanced Tank will become a reserve to the Main Body, and render it, if required, immediate assistance.

6. Duty of the Tank Main Body

The duty of the Main Body is to place the Infantry through the wire and to assist and protect them whilst capturing the objectives.

7. Area of Operations of Tank Main Body and Advanced Guard

The Area of Operations of the Main Body is the objective itself, that of the Advanced Tank the ground immediately in front of the objective and, generally speaking, on our side of the trench to be captured.

8. Number of Tanks to Frontages

The proportion of Tanks to be employed on any one front will depend more on the numbers of tactical points this front contains than on its extent. As a rough rule the allotment of Tanks to any one front may be calculated at one to every 100 to 200 yards of frontage.

9. Tank Formation of Attack

The Tank Unit of attack will be a Section of 3 Tanks which will work together, one acting as the Advanced Tank and two as the Main Body Tanks. If one of the Main Body Tanks break down, the Advanced Tank will replace it and lead the Infantry on.

The formation of attack should be one which will permit of Tanks in Sections of threes being launched at definite tactical points, rather than one in line equally distributed along the whole frontage, for the object of the Tanks is to penetrate the objective at several points, place the Infantry through at these points and protect the Infantry as they work down the trenches.

Briefly the object of the Tank is to break the enemy's line and then assist the Infantry to envelop the unbroken portions of it.

10. Allotment of Infantry to Tanks

Normally Infantry will only follow the Main Body. The number allotted to operate with each Tank will depend on the strength of the objective to be attacked and the nature and situation of the lines of approach leading up to it. In most cases it will not be advisable to allot more than one platoon (36 to 40 men) to follow immediately each Tank, as the path crushed down through the wire by the two tracks of the Tank will only permit of men moving along them in single file, and any crowding at the point of penetration may result in unnecessary casualties.

Digitized by Google

This allotment of one platoon per Tank does not prevent several other platoons following on behind and making use of the paths created. If the enemy's fire is not heavy, it should generally be feasible to traverse one path by four platoons without undue delay. Hurried crossings must, however, be avoided, for, if the leading men catch their foot in the crushed down wire and pull it up, delay to those in rear will result.

11. Formation of the Infantry

In order to facilitate the approach, Infantry should be organized in Section single files. These single files can advance either in small Platoon columns of four single files abreast, or in two of two abreast, or singly. They can also be rapidly formed into line should it be necessary for them to use their rifles. Whoever is at the head of the file is automatically file leader. This system enables command to be maintained during the approach and is most suitable when working with Tanks, as eventually single files have to be formed to cross the enemy's fire.

12. Organization of the Infantry Formation

The Infantry for each Trench Objective should be organized in three waves or lines.

1. Trench cleaners.
2. Trench stops.
3. Supports.

Their duties will be as follows:—

1. To operate with the Tanks and clear the trenches.

2. To form "Stops" in the trenches at various points and to improve paths through the wire. To mark these paths by means of flags so that those following may see where gaps exist. To place ladders in the captured trench, or prepare the parados for rapid exit.

3. To support (1) and (2) and form an Infantry advanced Guard on the further side of the trench to protect the advance of the next echelon.

Diagram 3 gives diagramatically the formation suggested for Company of Tanks and two Battalions of Infantry.

13. Organization of A Trench Cleaning Platoon

The Trench Cleaning Platoon should be organized on the lines laid down in S.S. 143, the bombers (1 section) alone entering the trench, the remaining three Sections working with the Tank along the trench in the open.

Digitized by Google

14. FORMING UP FOR ATTACK (*see* diagram 3)[1]

Tanks and Infantry will usually have to form up during hours of darkness, consequently if noise and confusion are to be prevented the most complete preparation for their assembly must be undertaken, and all falling in and movements must be reduced to a simple drill.

The preparation will consist in marking out the exact places where Tank and Infantry will stand and in taping and preparing routes to the places of assembly (Starting Points) and forward from them.

Diagram 3 shows a method of forming up a Company for the attack: A, B, C, D are the Advanced Tanks, E F, G H, I J and K L, those of the Main Body. Immediately behind these are placed 8 platoons each on a file frontage, that is two sections in single file side by side, and two in a similar formation behind them, these 8 platoons form the Trench Cleaners. At 50 yards distance behind the Trench Cleaners come 8 more platoons in similar formation, these are the Trench Stops. Behind these, at whatever distance considered necessary, are drawn up the supports in two lines, consisting of 8 platoons each as shown in Diagram 3.

15. MOVEMENT FORWARD

The movement forward will usually take place at dawn, the whole echelon moving off together, the Advanced Tanks slightly ahead. Zero hour must be selected at a time which will permit of the Tank Drivers seeing their way.

16. THE ATTACK

The Advanced Tanks will cross straight over the enemy's wire and swing to the left and move along the enemy's trench close to the parapet. They will not cross the trench until the Main Body Tanks and the Infantry are over.

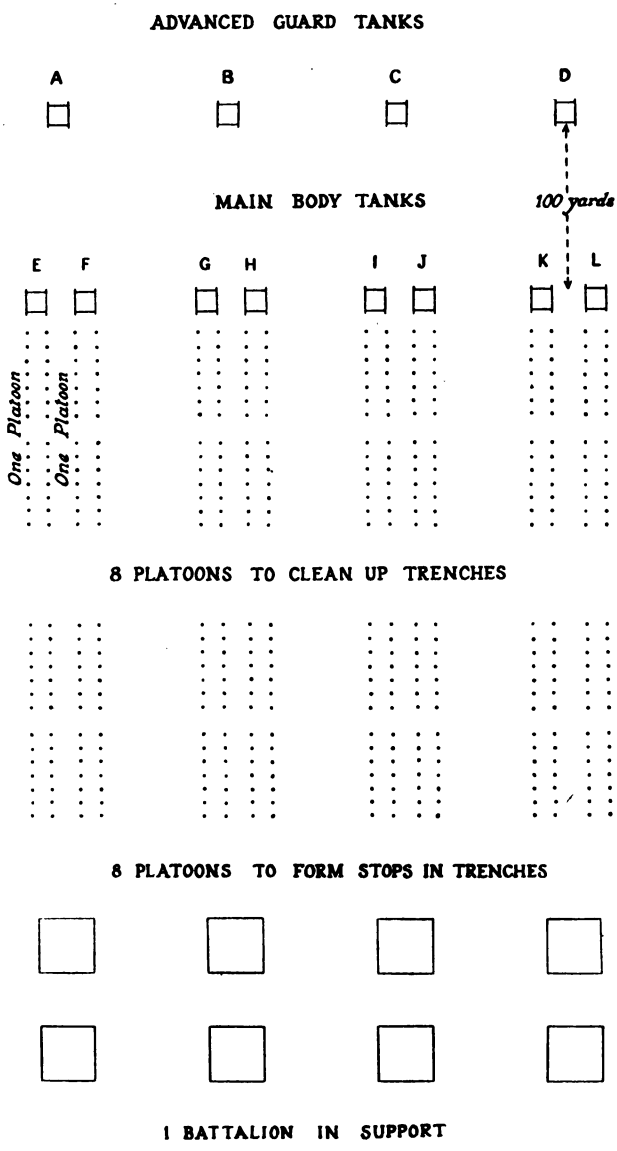
The Main Body Tanks will traverse the enemy's trench at the same spot, so as to economise in the use of fascines. One will move down the fire trench and the other proceed forward to the support trench, where, if necessary, it will cast its fascine and cross over, then turn and work down the support trench to the left.

Once a Tank Section Attack Area is cleared, the Advanced and Main Body Tanks should move forward and join those of the next echelon, which will probably by this time have gone through. By so doing each echelon will be reinforced as the battle proceeds. Infantry will not accompany these Tanks in this move.

[1] Page 352.

Digitized by Google

DIAGRAM 3



Digitized by Google

Once the Infantry have been well placed in the enemy's trenches by the Tanks, they must depend on themselves to do all minor cleaning-up work, as the number of Tanks available will seldom permit of Tanks remaining with them throughout an entire operation.

Should a Tank break down, the Infantry must press on by themselves: their security will depend on so doing.

17. RALLYING

If Tanks have been ordered to rally, so that they may reorganize for further operations, Infantry must release them from their protective duties at the earliest moment, for delay in doing so may cause failure in the plan of attack.

18. PRECAUTIONS IN CROSSING WIRE

Tanks working in threes should cross the wire at the same spot, or if this is not feasible, at intervals of not less than 100 yards. The reason for this is that it has been found that if two Tanks cross the wire at a less interval, the second Tank crossing sometimes loosens the wire crushed down by the first and partially closes the gap first made.

Infantry should keep from 25 to 50 paces behind the Tank as it enters the wire, so as not to get entangled in any trailing strands. Crowding round the Tank must be guarded against and also hurried progress along the path made, for otherwise loops of wire may be pulled up by the men's feet and the advance of those in rear delayed.

19. TANK FASCINES

Every fighting Tank will carry a Tank fascine. This consists of a large bundle of brushwood about 4 ft. 6 in. in diameter. It is used to fill in wide trenches and so enable the Tank to cross them.

Whenever a Tank fascine is used, the Tank Commander will have a red and yellow flag thrown out of the Tank, if he is unable to fix it in the ground. All Infantry, and especially those of the Trench Stopping party, must be warned to look out for these flags and when they find one, to stick it into the parapet three paces away to the right or left of the Tank fascine. The flag must not be placed immediately opposite the fascine, otherwise the next Tank crossing will either knock it over or have to send a man out to remove it.

20. TRAINING

The training of Infantry and Tanks will be carried out on the above lines, the following points being observed:—

(i) Exercises should be very simple.

Digitized by Google

(ii) The Assembly prior to the Attack and the attack between Infantry and a Section of 3 Tanks should be worked out as a drill and practised until it becomes automatic.

(iii) All attacking units should practise at least one Assembly at night.

(iv) Frequent practice in crossing wire which Tanks have crushed down should be carried out.

(v) Means of dealing with unexpected hostile machine guns should be carefully thought out by both Infantry and Tank Commanders and, if possible, practised during training.

(Issued by Third Army, 30th Oct. 1917)

APPENDIX 9B

NOTES ON INFANTRY AND TANK OPERATIONS

1. ORGANIZATION OF TANK UNITS

A Brigade consists of three Battalions, each of 3 Companies, each of 4 Sections, each of 3 Tanks. Total number of fighting Tanks to a Battalion is 36. The crew of each Tank consists of 1 Officer and 7 O.R.

2. TYPES OF TANKS

There are two types of Tanks: Male and Female. The Male carries 2 six-pounder guns and four Lewis guns. The Female 6 Lewis guns.

3. POWERS OF THE TANK

(i) Proof against bullets, shrapnel and splinters.

(ii) Can span 10 feet, surmount 5 ft. obstacles and climb slopes of 1/1½.

(iii) Speed over flat ground 100 to 120 yards a minute. Over ground intersected by trenches 30 to 40 yards a minute. At night 15 yards a minute.

(iv) Can pass through wire leaving a beaten-down track along which infantry can walk in single file.

4. LIMITATIONS OF THE TANK AND ITS CREW

(i) Circuit 8 to 10 miles.

(ii) Endurance of the crew 8 to 12 hours in action.

(iii) Cannot traverse swamps, thick woods, streams with marshy banks or deep sunken roads.

Digitized by Google

(iv) Cannot climb steep railway embankments.

(v) Finds difficulty in climbing high parados if trenches are broad.

(vi) Experiences difficulty in crossing newly dug trenches soaked with rain.

5. Recognition of Tanks

All Tanks are named and a Battalion number is painted on the tail plate of the Tank, *e.g.*, D.7, C.17, H.32, etc.

6. Frontages of Attack

The number of Tanks allotted to a frontage will depend more on the number of tactical points it contains than on its length. Roughly the allotment should be at the rate of 1 Tank to every 100 to 200 yards.

7. Tank Attack Formations

If possible a Company should not be allotted to 2 objectives and Sections or pairs of Tanks should work together. The normal attack formation of a Company is 4 independent Tanks as an Advanced Guard and 4 pairs as the Main Body with the Infantry.

8. Assembly Before Action

Success in attack will greatly depend on methodical and punctual assembly. Assembly places should be prepared beforehand, the positions Infantry and Tanks will fall in on being marked out. Routes to and from Assembly Places should be taped.

9. Concealment

Concealment from view and hearing is important. Tanks can be easily seen from aeroplanes flying 6,000 feet and under, and the noise of their engines can be heard when 400 yards away. During action smoke barrages afford excellent protection.

10. Forward Movement

By night forward movement is difficult. Zero hour should not be fixed during hours of darkness or dim twilight.

Tracks over our own trenches should be prepared beforehand.

Air lines must be raised to a height of 13 feet and the position of ground lines notified to Tank units beforehand. Ground lines should if possible be buried where Tanks cross them.

Digitized by Google

11. TACTICAL EMPLOYMENT

The Object of the Tank is :—

(i) To cover and protect the Infantry advance.

(ii) To reduce strong points.

(iii) To penetrate trench lines and assist the Infantry in clearing them of the enemy.

12. TANK OBJECTIVES

Tank objectives should if possible be visible from the Starting Points. Routes to them should be direct. Complicated movements with Tanks are most difficult.

13. CO-OPERATION WITH INFANTRY

Full advantage cannot be taken of the opportunities Tanks create unless Infantry are close by to seize them. Infantry, however, must not bunch behind a Tank, neither should they ON ANY ACCOUNT WAIT FOR A TANK unless the Tanks concerned have been specially detailed to operate against a strong point.

Once the Tanks have placed the Infantry securely on their objective Infantry should depend on themselves for the minor clearing up work.

14. CARRYING AMMUNITION FOR THE INFANTRY

Three or four boxes of S.A.A. or bombs can be carried in each Tank for the Infantry.

15. CROSSING WIRE

Tanks should either cross wire at the same spot or at intervals of 100 yards. Infantry should keep at least 25 paces in rear of a Tank crossing wire. The paths through the wire should be traversed at a walk. Infantry should mark the paths over the wire by a flag so that those following can pick up the gaps easily.

16. CROSSING TRENCHES

Tanks to assist themselves in crossing wide trenches carry fascines 4 ft. 6 ins. in diameter. When these are used the Tank's crew will throw out a red and yellow flag which the first infantry man passing should pick up and stick into the ground.

Infantry should be prepared rapidly to scale deep trenches and cross any which may contain sunk wire; the Tank cannot deal with this.

Digitized by Google

17. SIGNALS

Inter-Tank and Tank to Infantry Signals will be carried out by means of coloured discs. The following disc code should be known at sight by all Infantry :—

Green Disc	Wire cut (or crushed down).
Red ,,	Wire uncut.
Red Green or Green Red	Have reached my objective.
R.D. from Infantry to Tanks	Bayonet or rifle waved from side to side above head.
"Tank wanted" by Infantry to Tank	Helmet on rifle held above the head.

Two pigeons are carried in each Tank.

18. COUNTER-BATTERY WORK

Counter-Battery work is of great importance to the security of Tanks.

19. STAFF ASSISTANCE

The main assistance from the Staff of the Formation to which Tanks are attached will be as follows :—

G.S. (O) Immediate notice of change of plans. Simple, easily approached and clearly defined objectives. Good lines of approach—chalky soil and absence of mud. Barrage programme.
Working parties and signals.
Communications. Each Company H.Q. should be linked up to its Battalion H.Q. by a LINE OF ITS OWN and Battalion H.Q. to the H.Q. of the Formation to which it is attached.
Sharing lines will lead to failure.

G.S. (I) Air photographs. Situation maps and all information as regards ground.

Q. Accommodation, Supplies, facilities for dumping, occasional transport, special petrol.

A. Traffic Control.

20. REPORTS

It will be of great assistance if Formations to which the Tanks are attached will repeat to the next higher Tank Unit all reports affecting Tanks which they send out to their own next higher Formation. This refers to "G", "Q" and "A" Branches.

Digitized by Google

21. SUCCESS OF AN INFANTRY AND TANK OPERATION

Success depends on :—

(i) Mechanical fitness.

(ii) Smooth and practical assembly.

(iii) Straightforward and easily recognizable objectives.

(iv) Concealment and preparation of approaches.

(v) Every Infantry and Tank Officer knowing exactly what he has to do.

(Issued by Third Army, 30th Oct., 1917.)

APPENDIX 10

CAMBRAI 1917

TANK CORPS SPECIAL ORDER No. 6

1. Tomorrow the Tank Corps will have the chance for which it has been waiting for many months—to operate on good going in the van of the battle.

2. All that hard work and ingenuity can achieve has been done in the way of preparation.

3. It remains for unit commanders and for tank crews to complete the work by judgment and pluck in the battle itself.

4. In the light of past experience I leave the good name of the Corps with great confidence in their hands.

5. I propose leading the attack of the Centre division.

HUGH ELLES,
B.-Gr.
Commanding Tank Corps.

19 Nov. 1917.

APPENDIX 11

CAMBRAI 1917

62nd DIVISION ORDER No. 78[1]

16th November 1917

1. Intentions

On Z day the IV Corps are attacking the German Trenches between the Trescault—Ribécourt Road and the Canal du Nord with two Divisions—the 51st Division on the Right and the 62nd Division on the Left.

[1] See Sketch 3.

Digitized by Google

The 36th Division are attacking the German Trenches West of the Canal du Nord.

The Divisional Boundaries and Objectives of the first stage are shown on attached map.[1]

The plans of subsequent operations have been issued to all concerned.

Zero day will be notified later.

2. The essence of the operation is secrecy and speed.

The vital importance of secrecy must be impressed on all to whom it is necessary to communicate orders, and the most scrupulous care must be taken of all documents and maps.

3. Attack of 62nd Division

(*a*) The 62nd Division will attack with two Brigades abreast, the 185th Brigade on the Right and the 187th Brigade on the Left.

The two assaulting Brigades will capture the first two objectives, *i.e.*, up to the Brown Line.

Dividing line between Brigades is shown on attached map[1].

(*b*) The 186th Brigade is in Divisional Reserve and after the capture of the Brown Line will pass through the assaulting Brigades and drive back the enemy to the line Graincourt—Factory—Hindenburg Support line where it crosses the Spur in E.22—Trench running 250 yards North of Cambrai—Bapaume Road and Bridge where this road crosses the Canal du Nord. [3rd objective.]

A force from this Brigade will be sent to capture Anneux and the high ground W. of Bourlon Wood and to gain touch with the 1st Cavalry Division, which will be attacking Bourlon from the N.E.

Two Squadrons of King Edward's Horse are attached to the Division and will come under the orders of G.O.C. 186th Brigade for this operation.

4. Action of Assaulting Brigades

(*a*) By Zero hour the Battalions of the assaulting Brigades for the 1st objective will be formed up in or in the vicinity of the front line trenches opposite the points of attack and the Tanks allotted for the 1st objective will be formed up on their starting points—approximately our Outpost Line.

(*b*) At Zero hour the Tanks, the Wire Cutting Tanks leading by 4 minutes, will move forward to the attack, followed by the assaulting Infantry and covered by an Artillery and Machine Gun Barrage.

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

(*c*) The Infantry and Tanks detailed for the 2nd (Brown) objective will remain in, or in rear of, our front line system till the leading Battalions have reached the enemy's front line and will be moved forward at such an hour as to allow them to be formed up behind the 1st objective, ready to advance at Zero+2¼ hours.

If the Tanks and Infantry, for the 2nd Objective, advance separately, careful arrangements must be made for their meeting at a rendezvous this side of the 1st Objective.

(*d*) The leap frog method of advance will be adopted, and all trenches will be thoroughly "mopped up" so as to enable our troops to leave the captured trenches and move forward as the situation develops.

"P" Bombs will only be used for dug-outs as a last resort as they set them on fire and deprive us of their use.

(*e*) Each objective will be prepared for defence in depth after its capture, and the assaulting troops quickly reorganized and disposed to repel any counter-attack.

5. Action of Reserve Brigade

(*a*) The 186th Brigade will move up into Havrincourt Wood on Y/Z night so as to arrive in their assembly positions 1 hour before Zero.

Assembly positions will be partly in the front line system and partly in the open in the Wood. Exact locality of assembly position will be notified later.

After the capture of the 1st objective the Brigade will be moved up to a position of assembly East of Havrincourt.

The order for this advance will be given to G.O.C. 186th Brigade at Divisional Headquarters.

Brigade H.Q. will then move forward with the Brigade to the East of Havrincourt.

The G.O.C. 186th Brigade will, according to the situation, himself decide the Zero hour at which his Brigade can advance through the Brown Line, and will inform Divisional H.Q.

The general outline plan of advance of the 186th Brigade, as far as the Graincourt—Demicourt Road, is as follows:—

(i) One Battalion on the Right to advance on Graincourt under a heavy Artillery Barrage on the edge of the village.

(ii) One Battalion on the Left, preceded by Tanks, well in advance, to push forward along the Hindenburg Support line.

Artillery, during this advance, will not fire South of the Graincourt—Demicourt Road.

Special instructions are being issued to G.O.C. 186th Brigade.

Digitized by Google

6. ACTION OF CAVALRY

The 2 Squadrons King Edward's Horse will rendezvous West of Havrincourt Wood at Zero+2½ hours.

The O.C. will report at Divisional Headquarters at Zero + 1 hour.

Officers' reconnoitring patrols will be sent forward shortly after Zero to keep touch with the situation and to select routes for the advance to a rendezvous East of Havrincourt.

As soon as the Brown line is captured, the Cavalry will move forward to a rendezvous East of Havrincourt and will then come under the orders of the G.O.C. 186th Brigade.

7. ACTION OF TANKS

(*a*) "G" Battalion Tank Corps (60 Tanks) under the command of Lieut.-Col. Hankey will support the attack.

30 Tanks are allotted to the 185th Brigade and 30 Tanks to the 187th Brigade.

6 Tanks in each Brigade will be kept back for the attack of the 2nd objective.

(*b*) On Y/Z night Tanks will move from the advanced Tankodrome at the S.W. corner of Havrincourt Wood to their "Lying "up" positions.

They will advance from these positions so as to be on a line about 1,000 yards from the German outpost line at 1 hour before Zero, *i.e.*, behind our front line system.

From these positions they will move at such an hour as to pass the "Starting Points", *i.e.*, approximately our outpost line, at Zero.

(*c*) The Tanks will advance at Zero and will act in accordance with the general plan of attack and detailed orders drawn up between Brigadiers and Tank Company Commanders.

(*d*) After the capture of the Brown line, all available Tanks will support the advance of the 186th Brigade.

Every advantage will be taken of the enemy's demoralization and, as soon as the Infantry have secured the Brown line and the Tanks have reorganized, they will advance well ahead of the Infantry.

On the Right they will not be able to approach Graincourt until the Artillery lifts, at which time the Infantry will be close behind, but on the Left they will advance and clear the area between the Hindenburg Support line and the Canal as far as the Graincourt—Demicourt Road.

Plans showing positions and routes of Tanks are being issued to all concerned.

Digitized by Google

8. Action of Artillery

(*a*) Artillery barrage maps for the attack of the first two objectives have been issued to all concerned. Artillery fire will open at Zero.

(*b*) As soon as the Brown line is captured, the Field Artillery will be moved forward to the Havrincourt—Flesquières Ridge to cover the advance of the 186th Brigade.

A Zero hour for this advance to commence will be fixed after capture of the Brown line, and targets for the Artillery to engage at and after Zero laid down.

(*c*) A senior Artillery Liaison Officer will be attached to each Brigade and will join Brigade H.Q. on Y/Z night.

9. Action of Machine Guns

(*a*) A Machine Gun barrage map for the attack of the first two objectives has been issued to all concerned. Machine Guns will open fire at Zero.

(*b*) 213th Machine Gun Company will revert to 186th Brigade when its barrage task is finished.

The Divisional Machine Gun Company will move at Zero + 2 hours, to a rendezvous E. of Havrincourt and will act under the orders of the G.O.C. 186th Brigade to support the advance of that Brigade.

(*c*) Brigades will arrange for certain Vickers and Lewis Guns to be detailed to deal with low-flying aeroplanes.

10. Liaison with Neighbouring Divisions

(*a*) The 51st Division are attacking on our Right with their 153rd Brigade on their Left.

To ensure close touch between Divisions, the 185th Brigade will tell off special parties to meet similar parties of the 153rd Brigade at the following places :—

At Dividing Line of Brigades on Hindenburg Front and Support Trench.
At Corner of Triangle Wood. [S. slope of Grand Ravin.]
At Ravine at K.29.c.30.77. [Bottom of Grand Ravin.]
In Trench at K.29.a.42.82. [Communication trench farther slope of Grand Ravin.]
On Railway.
In Flesquières Line at K.17.c.90.50. [600 yds. W. of Flesquières.]

(*b*) The 109th Brigade of the 36th Division are attacking the Spoil Heap at about Zero + 120 and are then wor ing up the West bank of the Canal.

The 187th and 186th Brigades will detail special parties to keep touch with a platoon of the 109th Brigade which is advancing on the East bank of the Canal.

Digitized by Google

11. Opening up Road Communications

(*a*) The roads it is proposed to open up are shown on attached map[1]. They will be cleared to enable guns and limbered G.S. wagons to pass and be improved for general traffic later.

(*b*) The working parties of R.E. and Infantry detailed for road work will be bivouacked in Havrincourt Wood on Y/Z night, and will follow closely the rear Battalions of the assaulting Brigades.

(*c*) It is very important that the roads should be passable for the passage of Artillery as far as Havrincourt, shortly after the capture of the Brown line.

12. Contact Aeroplanes

(*a*) Contact Aeroplanes will call for flares on the Blue and Brown line at about + 120 and + 220 and also at intervals throughout the day.

(*b*) The aeroplane will call for flares by sounding the Klaxon Horn and firing a Very light.

(*c*) Each Contact Aeroplane will be marked with a black rectangular disc 1½″ by 1″ on the rear edge of the lower plane on each side.

(*d*) When the Aeroplane fires a Very light, each section of Infantry in the leading line will at once light one or two flares.

(*e*) The Flares for Infantry are White.
for Cavalry are Red.

13. S.O.S. Signals

The S.O.S. Signal is a rifle grenade bursting into coloured light :—

IV. Corps, V. Corps	2 Red and 2 White.
III. Corps	2 Green and 2 White.
VI. Corps	2 Red and 2 Green.
Cavalry	Green 1″ Very Light.

14. Headquarters

The following will be the positions of Headquarters at Zero :—

IV. Corps	Villers au Flos.
185th Bde.	Cosy Copse Q.3.d.5.3. [Havrincourt Wood.]
186th ,,	Neuville.
187th ,,	K.31.c.2.3. [Havrincourt Wood.]
51st Divn.	Little Wood (Ytres) P.26. central. [South side.]
153rd Bde.	Q.10.a.4.4. [S. edge of Trescault.]
36th Divn.	Ytres.
109th Bde.	Bertincourt.

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

15. ZERO HOUR

Zero hour will be notified later.

16. SYNCHRONIZATION OF WATCHES

Instructions for synchronization of watches will be issued later.

17. Divisional H.Q. will be at Neuville in the first instance.

18. Acknowledge.

Issued at 11.55 p.m.

C. R. NEWMAN,
Lieut.-Colonel,
General Staff 62nd Division.

APPENDIX 12

CAMBRAI 1917

29th DIVISION ORDER No. 167[1]

18th November, 1917.

1. On the date known as Z-day, the III. Corps and the IV. Corps on its left will attack. Zero hour will be notified. This operation will be carried out in five phases.

1st Phase. The attack on the German first and second lines of defence by the 12th Division on the right, 20th Division in the Centre, 6th Division on the left, and 29th Division in Reserve.

2nd Phase. On the capture of the German second (Brown) line the 29th Division will pass through the leading Division as follows :—

The 88th Brigade with one section 497th Field Coy. R.E. and the bearer division 88th Field Ambulance attached, will force the crossing of the St. Quentin Canal at Masnières assisted by tanks and will seize and consolidate the Masnières—Beaurevoir line from G.27.B. [due E. of sugar factory] to the Masnières—Cambrai Road G.20.B. inclusive, and will be protected on its right flank by the 59th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. Hyslop, D.S.O.), 20th Division, which will form a defensive flank from M.8.b. through M.2.d. and b. to the road junction G.26.d.1.5. [northward from Lateau Wood].

[1] See Sketch 2.

Digitized by Google

2nd Phase *continued.* The 87th Brigade with one section 455th Field Coy. R.E. and bearer division 87th Field Ambulance attached, will force the crossings of the Canal East of Marcoing, and, assisted by tanks, seize and consolidate the Masnières—Beaurevoir line from the Masnières—Cambrai Road exclusive to the Canal at L.12c. [Flot Farm vicinity].

The 86th Brigade with one section 510th Field Coy. R.E. and bearer division 89th Field Ambulance attached, with the assistance of tanks, will capture and consolidate a position from the Canal in L.12. through L.11.d. and c. North of Nine Wood to Premy Chapel Hill [see 3rd objective on sketch] where its left flank will be protected by the 18th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. Craufurd) of the 6th Division. On attaining the above line success will be exploited by strong patrols.

3rd Phase. Three Divisions of Cavalry will pass through the 29th Division, the 5th Cav. Div. followed by 2nd Cav. Div. at Masnières and Marcoing working to the East and North-East, and the 1st Cav. Div. moving on Noyelles and Cantaing to the North, with one Regiment moving East of the Canal. Roads and bridges are to be kept clear to ensure the passage of the Cavalry is not impeded.

4th Phase. As soon as the above-mentioned position is consolidated by the 29th Division, and sufficient Cavalry have passed over to screen the further advance, the 88th Brigade will push forward to G.23. Central [1,200 yds. N. of Crèvecoeur] and consolidate a position across the top of the spur back to the bridge on the Canal at G.34.d.0.9. [Mon Plaisir Farm bridge] leaving two battalions to hold the Beaurevoir line. The 87th Brigade will send one battalion to hold and consolidate the Northern and Eastern fringe of Rumilly, and a second battalion to the knoll in G.2. and 3. [1 mile N. of Rumilly] keeping two battalions in the Beaurevoir line.

In support of the above movements the Brigade of the 20th Division holding the line from M.2.d. to Masnières [see defensive flank] will move forward and establish themselves on the Bonavis—Crèvecoeur ridge. A second Brigade of the 20th Division will move to Masnières.

The 86th Brigade will then be relieved by the 6th Division and will come into Reserve in Marcoing or East of that village and be ready to follow up the Cavalry at dawn on Z plus 1 day.

Digitized by Google

5th Phase[1]. At dawn on Z plus 1 day the Cavalry will continue its advance to the East and North-East and a defensive flank will be formed by the III. Corps as follows :—

The 20th Division will hold the Eastern approaches to Crèvecoeur and as far North as the track in H.19.a. [W. of Seranvillers].

The 86th Brigade moving at 6.15 a.m. will take over and consolidate a defensive position from the track in H.19.a. along the Eastern slope of the spur in H.13.c. and a. and H.7.c. as far North as La Belle Etoile knoll in B.25.c. exclusive.

The 87th Brigade will move to Niergnies and will consolidate the knoll La Belle Etoile inclusive, and the Northern slopes of the spur running to the West as far as H.28. Central [frontage of 2,500 yds. facing N.], leaving a detachment on the knoll G.2. and 3. [1 m. N. of Rumilly].

The 88th Brigade will move to a position about G.11. Central [2,000 yds. N.E. of Rumilly] ready to operate as required.

Div. H.Q. will remain at Quentin Mill [E. side of Gouzeaucourt] during Z-day and on Z plus 1 day will move forward to a position about Rumilly, which will be notified to Brigades later.

2. Brigades will assemble in their allotted areas on Y/Z night by Zero — 2 hours.

3. At Zero the leading battalions of each Infantry Brigade, preceded by small Advanced Guards, will take over the present front line from the 20th and 6th Division[2] as under :—

88th Bde.
87th Bde.
86th Bde.
} [Map co-ordinates given for frontages of brigades right to left]

4. As soon as the second objective (Brown line) has been captured and orders received from Divisional H.Q. to " Move ":

The 88th Inf. Bde. will move via the La Vacquerie valley, and crossing the Brown Line about square L.35. [Welsh Ridge] will attack Masnières from the South-West and will continue the attack consolidating the line as laid down in para. 1, Phase 2.

The 87th Inf. Bde. will move via the Eastern slopes of the Couillet Wood valley, and crossing the Brown Line about square L.34. [Couillet Wood] will attack Marcoing from the South, and will continue the attack consolidating the line as laid down in para. 1, Phase 2.

[1] See Map 1.
[2] See Sketch 2.

Digitized by Google

The 86th Inf. Bde. will cross the Brown Line in square L.27. [Grand Ravin] and will attack and capture Nine Wood consolidating the Red Line from the Wood to the Canal. They will be responsible for forming a defensive flank to the North, and will assist by their fire the attack of the 87th Inf. Bde. on Marcoing from the South-West.

5. The attached tracing shows the dividing lines between Brigades.[1]

6. The advance of each Brigade will be covered by one Brigade of Field or Horse Artillery as under :—

88th Inf. Bde. by 15th Bde. R.H.A. firing from positions about R.5.c. [3,000 yds. S.W. of les Rues Vertes].

87th Inf. Bde. by 17th Bde. R.F.A. firing from positions about L.33.b. [1,800 yds. S. W. of Marcoing Copse].

86th Inf. Bde. by 16th Bde. R.H.A. firing from positions about L.32.d. [3,300 yds. S.W. of Nine Wood].

The orders for the advance of this Artillery will be issued by Div. H.Q. as soon as the Brown Line has been captured.

7. Four tanks are allotted to each Infantry Brigade but troops will in no case wait for the tanks if by so doing their advance is likely to be retarded. The positions at which these tanks will be picked up will be notified later.

8. A Contact Aeroplane will fly over the Corps front at

Zero plus 45 mins.
Zero plus 2 hrs. 15 mins.
Zero plus 3 hrs.
Zero plus 3 hrs. 30 mins.

and subsequently as ordered.

9. Watches will be synchronized by a Staff Officer from Div. H.Q. at 9.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. on 'Y' day.

10. Divisional H.Q. will be established at Quentin Mill [E. side of Gouzeaucourt] at 4.30 p.m. Y/Z night.

11. *Acknowledge.*

F. H. MOORE,
Lieut.-Colonel, G.S.,
29th Division.

Issued at 1.30 p.m.

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 13

CAMBRAI 1917

C.R.E. 29th DIVISION INSTRUCTION No. 1[1]

1. The following Instruction is issued with reference to Extracts from 29th Division Operations Instruction, already issued.

2. Reference para. 4, and para. 15, 29th Division Operations Instruction No. 1[2].

The Kent Field Company is detailed for the crossings from Masnières to the Bridges and Lock in L.24.c. [E. of Marcoing copse] (both inclusive).

The West Riding Field Company is detailed for the crossings from the Bridges in L.23.d. [N. of Marcoing copse] to Marcoing (both inclusive).

3. Should the Bridges have been destroyed, their task will be to make practicable crossings for Infantry, under cover of our Artillery bombardment and rifle fire; and after the passage of the Infantry to make them practicable for Cavalry.

4. Should the Bridges be standing, abutments and other likely places must be searched for mines, necessary repairs carried out to enable all arms to cross, obstructions in the main thoroughfares removed, and wells cleared and fitted for drawing water.

5. Reconnaissance is to be made of the main routes forward, viz.:—

(*a*) Gouzeaucourt—Barricade—la Vacquerie—Masnières (Kent Field Company).

(*b*) Gouzeaucourt—Villers Plouich—Marcoing (West Riding Field Coy.),

for the passage of the Pontoon wagons; and suitable sites selected for Pontoon Bridges, in case they should be required. These reports will be sent back to C.R.E. at Quentin Mill, who will issue necessary orders to the 2 Pontoon Detachments.

6. The 2 Pontoon Detachments will assemble as under, on afternoon of 'Y' day, on the prepared ground, East of Tyke Dump [on main road S.W. of Gouzeaucourt]—

(*a*) Pontoon equipment and detachment of London Field Coy., plus four Pontoon wagons of No. 3 Pontoon Park under Captain D. Comins, R.E. The Kent Field Company will detail a subaltern for this detachment on 'Y' day.

(*b*) Pontoon equipment and detachments of West Riding and Kent Field Companies plus two Pontoon wagons of No. 3 Pontoon Park under Lieutenant Bridgen, R.E.

---

[1] See Sketch 2.

[2] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

The Pontoon wagons of No. 3 Pontoon Park will join the respective Companies on the morning of 'Y' day, under orders already issued.

Both Pontoon Detachments will have picks, shovels and sandbags for any necessary work on approaches.

Surplus Pontoon equipment to be stored near sites of Bridges and maintenance parties to be left in charge. Pontoon wagons to be accompanied by spare animals.

7. On 'Z' day the West Riding and Kent Field Companies will march from their assembly positions, in rear of the Infantry of the Division. The Kent Field Company taking the route followed by the 88th Brigade, and the West Riding Field Company by that followed by the 87th Brigade. O.C., Field Companies will keep in touch with the G.O.C's., 88th and 87th Brigades respectively, throughout the operations.

8. The West Riding and Kent Field Companies will carry cutting tools, augers, hammers (hand, heavy and sledge), crowbars, spikes, small dogs, light tackle and blocks, cordage (1½" and 2"), binding wire, wire cutters, and proportion of picks and shovels (for Bridge approaches and general use), 1,000 sandbags, explosives, and direction boards.

Pack mules will be taken, but no vehicles.

9. With reference to 29th Division Operations Instruction No. 11[1] the London Field Company will detail 3 sections each under an Officer, to join the 86th, 87th and 88th Brigades respectively at 4.0 p.m. on 'Y' day. These 3 sections will assemble with their respective Brigades on Y/Z night. During the advance they will form part of the Advanced Guard of each Brigade, to assist in clearing obstacles, etc., especially up to, and including the crossing of the Brown line, in L.35, L.34, and L.27[2]. These 3 sections will carry cutting tools, cordage (1½" and 2"), wire cutters, explosives, crowbars, and a proportion of picks and shovels, also 4 sandbags per man.

10. Brigade Headquarters are as follows :—

Concentration Area.

86th Inf. Bde.	Equancourt.	[S.W. of Gouzeaucourt]
87th Inf. Bde.	Fins.	
88th Inf. Bde.	Sorel.	

Assembly Area (Y/Z night).

86th Inf. Bde.	Q.29.b.2.2.	[N.W. side of Gouzeaucourt]
87th Inf. Bde.	Q.29.d.3.9.	
88th Inf. Bde.	Q.29.d.8.5.	

[1] Not reproduced.
[2] See Appendix 12.

Digitized by Google

Advanced H.Q. Present Front Line System (' *Z* ' *morning*).

86th Inf. Bde.	R.13.a.2.7.	(Road) } [Villers
87th Inf. Bde.	R.14.a.9.9.	(Ravine) } Plouich]
88th Inf. Bde.	R.14.d.5.1.	[mid-way between Villers Plouich and la Vacquerie]

11. Reference para. 10 (*e*) of 29th Division Operations Instruction No. 2[1].

O.C., 1/2nd Monmouthshire Pioneers will detail (under orders already issued) 3 taping Parties, each under an Officer, to lay forward tape lines from the present front line system to Advanced Brigade Headquarters. These Officers will report to their respective G.O.C., Brigades on ' Y ' day.

12. With reference to C.E. Instruction No. 1, para. 3.[1] The section of 178th Tunnelling Coy. R.E. will assemble on ' Y ' day at Gonnelieu and will send an orderly to C.R.E. 29th Division at Quentin Mill. On receipt of orders from C.R.E., 29th Division, the section will go forward and act as directed in C.E. Instructions. Information as to bridges and wells in Marcoing and Masnières has already been supplied.

13. The London, West Riding, and Kent Field Companies will detail one additional orderly each to report at Quentin Mill, 5 p.m. ' Y ' day.

14. Relay Posts will be established at Sunk Road R. 16.a. 1.1. [N. of la Vacquerie] and Sunk Road R. 8. c. 42 [N. of Villers Plouich] by Kent and West Riding Field Companies respectively.

15. The tool-carts and transport of the Divisional R.E. will be concentrated at Sorel-le-Grand on Y/Z night. A move forward to the neighbourhood of Gouzeaucourt will be made on ' Z ' day, if possible.

16. Men will be in light marching order (with jerkins or great-coats), box respirators (No P.H. Helmet) water bottle, iron ration, and rations for ' Z ' and ' Z ' + 1 days, rifle and 50 rounds S.A.A.

17. C.R.E., Headquarters will move from Sorel to Quentin Mill on ' Y ' day at noon. Lieutenant Williamson, R.E., will remain with rear D.H.Q. at Sorel.

H. BIDDULPH,
Lt.-Col., R.E.,
C.R.E., 29th Division.

18th November, 1917.

[1] Not reproduced.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 14

CAMBRAI 1917

G.H.Q. INSTRUCTIONS TO THIRD ARMY, 25th NOVEMBER[1]

O.A.D. 713

General The Hon. Sir J. H. G. Byng, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., M.V.O., Commanding Third Army

1. In confirmation of verbal instructions already given, the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief desires that your efforts shall now be directed to securing, with the least possible delay, the ground already won. For this purpose immediate steps should be taken to gain such tactical points on the front and flanks of Bourlon Wood as you may consider it advisable to hold to ensure the security of that most important position.

2. The 2nd and 47th Divisions and the Cavalry Corps will remain temporarily at your disposal for the above purpose.

3. If any favourable opportunities should offer for local exploitation of success beyond the line already gained, especially by mounted troops, they should be taken advantage of, particularly to the North and on the flanks of the Bourlon Position. With this exception no attempt should be made to push the success already gained beyond what is necessary or advisable for security.

4. Plans and preparations should be made at once to attack and follow up the enemy if he attempts to withdraw to a more retired line of defence, and with this object the preparations on the VI. Corps front as already ordered by you should be continued; but any such measures must be entirely secondary to the object stated in paragraph 1 of these instructions, to which your resources should be devoted to whatever extent may be necessary to attain the object. It is of special importance that your Artillery should be distributed and disposed for the defence of vulnerable and important points in your new line.

5. When the situation has become sufficiently stabilized and secure, the Cavalry Corps will be withdrawn to take over the front allotted to it for the winter.

Arrangements are being made now for the withdrawal of the French forces under General Degoutte. You will be informed of the movements of these troops in due course.

L. E. KIGGELL,
Lieutenant-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

Adv. Operations G.H.Q.
25th November 1917.

[1] See Sketch 11.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 15

CAMBRAI 1917

THIRD ARMY INSTRUCTIONS TO IV. CORPS TO CEASE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS, 27th NOVEMBER[1]

Lieut.-Gen. Sir C. L. Woollcombe, K.C.B., Commanding IV. Corps

1. In confirmation of the verbal instructions given you this afternoon, the resources at the disposal of the Army do not permit of the offensive being continued any longer.

2. The Army Commander directs, therefore, that you consolidate securely the most suitable line now in your possession, in order to safeguard the Bourlon position, the retention of which is very important.

3. If, with a view to greater security, you consider it advisable and possible without undue losses, to advance your left flank between Bourlon and the Canal du Nord, you are authorized to undertake the operation with 2nd Division.

4. 47th and 59th Divisions are at your disposal for the relief of 62nd and Guards Divisions when required. The relief of these troops should not, however, be unduly hurried, as other fresh troops cannot be made available for some days, and our resources must be economized.

5. It is essential that you retain a force close in rear of the Bourlon position, organized for immediate counter-attack in the event of the enemy breaking through our defences. Cover for this force must be provided.

6. To provide further for the security of the ground gained by us, you will organize a defensive line in rear to safeguard the Flesquières—Havrincourt position and the Canal Crossing in K.15. [almost due W. of Flesquières].

7. You should also contemplate the construction of an intermediate line covering Graincourt as soon as it can be undertaken, having due regard to the prior importance of the work explained in paras. 2, 5 and 6 above.

8. 62nd and Guards Divisions, when relieved, will be left temporarily at your disposal as a reserve. These troops may

[1] See Sketch 12.

Digitized by Google

be employed for the work mentioned in para. 5. You should, therefore, organize as good accommodation as possible for these two Divisions in the vicinity of Hermies and Havrincourt.

9. You will dispose and employ your artillery with a view to safeguarding to the fullest extent the vulnerable and important parts of the position which is being consolidated, and at the same time with a view to inflicting as much loss as possible on the enemy.

10. The Tanks will now be withdrawn and are not to be used for further offensive operations on your front.

LOUIS VAUGHAN
Major-General,
General Staff, Third Army.

27th November 1917.

APPENDIX 16

CAMBRAI 1917

55th DIVISION WARNING ORDER, 28th NOVEMBER 1917

To all concerned (55th Division). Urgent Operations Priority. 28th November 1917 (untimed).

" Certain indications during today point to the possibility of " enemy making an attack against our front. All troops will " be warned to be specially on the alert in trenches and all " posts. Special patrols will be sent out at 4 a.m. to watch for " enemy movement. Artillery will open fire on enemy front " line in bursts commencing at 5 a.m. Most likely places of " enemy concentration to be selected by B.G'sC. Infantry " Brigades and Group Commanders in consultation. In case of " enemy attack all trenches and posts will be held to the last " at all costs and there will be no retirement from any line to " another line. Action of troops available for counter-attack " will be considered now. All machine guns will be warned to " be specially on the look-out for S.O.S. signals. From 5 a.m. " 29th inst. 1/4th L. North Lancashire will be ready to move " at half hour's notice from receipt of orders. Remainder of " 164th Infantry Brigade will be ready to move at one hour's " notice from same time.

" Sentries and patrols will be specially watchful for any " signs of enemy gaps in his wire tonight ".

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 17

CAMBRAI 1917

CAVALRY CORPS ORDER FOR COUNTER-ATTACK, 1st DECEMBER 1917[1]

G.20

The 5th Cavalry Division, with the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade attached to it, will attack Gauche Wood and Villers Guislain tomorrow 1st December, co-operating with 14 tanks, 8 of which will be directed on Gauche Wood and 6 on Villers Guislain.

Tanks will cross a north and south line through W. 12. central [due N. of Chapel Hill] for the attack on Gauche Wood and a line from Vaucelette Farm to Chapel Hill in their advance on Villers Guislain at 6.30 a.m.

4th Cavalry Division less Lucknow Cavalry Brigade will be assembled west of Peizière by 6.30 a.m. with the object of taking advantage of the advance of the tanks and seizing the Villers Ridge.

The 2nd Cavalry Division will assemble west of Gouzeaucourt by 7 a.m. in readiness to move forward when required.

As the tanks and cavalry move forward an attack will be carried out by the Guards Division to seizè the Quentin Ridge.

A. F. HOME,
B.G.G.S.

Cavalry Corps H.Q.
6.40 p.m.
30th November 1917.

APPENDIX 18

CAMBRAI 1917

III. CORPS ORDER FOR COUNTER-ATTACK, 1st DECEMBER 1917[1]

1. The situation of the 3rd Corps this evening appears to be as follows :—

The line held runs approximately from X.13. central along the railway to R.31.d.1 8, thence along the Northern edge of the Quentin Ridge and Gonnelieu Village to la Vacquerie, thence via R.16. central—R.11. central—R.5.a. central to les Rues Vertes. Masnières is in our possession and there is no change on the left front of the Corps [see line on Sketch 14].

[1] See Sketch 16.

Digitized by Google

2. The Cavalry Corps (less 1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions) will carry out an operation to-morrow morning under arrangements to be made by the Cavalry Corps with a view to capturing Gauche Wood (if not already in our hands) and Villers Hill, and Villers Guislain.

3. The O.C., 2nd Bde. Tank Corps, will place all the tanks he has been able to collect to-night in W.18.c. [1,000 yards W. of Vaucelette Farm] at the disposal of the Cavalry Corps for this purpose.

4. The Guards Division will simultaneously with the attack by the Cavalry Corps seize the Quentin Ridge, from Gauche Wood to Gonnelieu, and secure observation down into Twenty-two Ravine [western end of Banteux Ravine].

5. The tanks of the 2nd Bde. Tank Corps assembled at Queens Cross are at the disposal of Guards Division for the operation.

6. The artillery of the 12th Division will assist in the operations of the Cavalry Corps.

7. Divisions will reorganize their defences to-night and consolidate as rapidly as possible on the remainder of the Corps front.

8. The 59th Sqn. R.F.C. will place aeroplanes at the disposal of the Cavalry Corps and Guards Divisions as required.

9. Acknowledge.

C. G. FULLER,
B.G.G.S.,
III. Corps.

Issued by S.D.R. at 10.0 p.m.

APPENDIX 19

CAMBRAI 1917

G.H.Q. ORDER FOR WITHDRAWAL ON THE BOURLON FRONT[1] 3rd DECEMBER 1917

To

General The Hon. Sir Julian Byng, K.C.B., Commanding Third Army.

1. In accordance with the verbal instructions given to you by the Commander-in-Chief this morning the Third Army front will be withdrawn with the least possible delay from the Bourlon Hill—Marcoing salient to a more retired and shorter line of defence to be selected by you.

[1] See Sketch 19.

Digitized by Google

2. The line chosen should be the best available with a view to gaining security of defence combined with economy of troops. The abandonment of ground recently won is quite secondary to these considerations.

3. The security of your right flank about la Vacquerie, Welsh Spur [Ridge], and to the south of those places, is so essential to the security of whatever line you select to the north and north-west of those places that your particular attention is drawn to this matter.

L. E. KIGGELL,
Lieutenant-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

APPENDIX 20

CAMBRAI 1917

PLAN OF RETIREMENT ON THE V. CORPS FRONT TO THE HINDENBURG LINE

V. Corps
G.S.306/1
4th December, 1917.

2nd Division.
47th Division.
51st Division.
59th Division.

1. The attached map[1] shows :—

(*a*) Divisional areas.

(*b*) Main line of defence to be taken up on completion of withdrawal.

(*c*) Sections of defence allotted to Divisions.

(*d*) Line to be occupied by the rear-guard and held pending further orders.

(*e*) Areas to be occupied by divisions in advance of the main line of resistance, and general line of posts to be formed after the rear-guard position is abandoned.

(*f*) Timing of main bodies of divisions through rear-guard position (Yellow line on map).

(*g*) Time of withdrawal of the rear-guard.

(*h*) Line to be held by 6th Division, III. Corps.

[1] Not reproduced : see Sketch 19.

Digitized by Google

2. Before the retirement commences, the main line of defence, the posts in front of it, and the areas to be occupied in advance of this main line will be strongly held by reserve troops and machine guns.

3. Main bodies of troops holding the front line system will in all cases pass straight through the Hindenburg Line to a previously appointed assembly position in their own divisional area. The rear-guard at the time appointed for withdrawal will retire straight through to the Yellow line where they will take up their positions.

All troops including the rear-guard will fall back under proper control and the strictest discipline, the usual tactical precautions being observed, especially on flanks and rear.

4. All troops other than fighting troops will be withdrawn on "Z" minus 1 day from the forward areas to be occupied by divisions.

5. All men who are not physically fit will be sent back to the transport lines of their units as soon as possible.

6. Picked officers and men with Lewis gun detachments will be selected to form the rear-guard and it will be impressed on them that every opportunity should be taken of inflicting loss on the enemy.

7. Machine guns will be placed in selected positions in divisional areas of retirement, their duty being to protect the withdrawal from any enemy enterprise, and to cover the retirement of the rear-guard to the Yellow line.

Arrangements will be made for machine gun barrages to cover the main line of defence and the area occupied in advance of this by troops of 2nd Division.

8. ARTILLERY

Some of the Heavy and Field batteries have already been withdrawn. The Divisional Artillery will be thinned out under orders to be issued by the G.O.C.R.A., V. Corps, one or two sections per battery proceeding to take up the new position selected for the defence of the Hindenburg Line.

The time of withdrawal of these sections will depend on the date selected for the general retirement.

In all cases a few single guns per Divisional Artillery will remain in position in rear of the Yellow Line until ordered to withdraw.

9. Secrecy is of vital importance and the greatest care must be observed with regard to telephone conversation.

Digitized by Google

The Corps Commander would prefer that only the officers detailed to command the various rear-guard detachments should be informed until the last moment, unless it is considered by Divisional Commanders necessary that the details of the plan should be more generally known to ensure success.

10. Artillery fire, rifle fire, sending up of Very lights, etc., will be as normal as possible.

11. If booby traps and other devices for inflicting loss on the enemy can be improvised it would be an advantage.

12. All telephone lines except those absolutely essential will be reeled up beforehand.

13. Efforts will be made, as far as time permits, to remove all stores and material in the area to be vacated. Captured enemy guns which can be so dealt with, will be withdrawn in rear of the Hindenburg Line and those which cannot be withdrawn will be destroyed under arrangements which have already been made.

14. The bridges on the Bapaume—Cambrai road will be prepared for demolition, but will not be blown up without orders from Corps Headquarters, which will be issued through G.O.C., 2nd Division.

Chief Engineer, V. Corps, will arrange for the charges to be detonated from the area South of the Bapaume—Cambrai road to be occupied by troops of 2nd Division. An R.E. officer located in this area will be responsible for the detonation of the charges on receipt of orders which will probably be issued on "Z" plus 1 day.

No dug-outs will be destroyed before the withdrawal is complete and the rear-guard has taken up its position. Dug-outs will be prepared for demolition as far as possible, especially in the area South of the Bapaume—Cambrai road to be occupied by troops of 2nd Division, these dug-outs being destroyed by orders of the G.O.C., if the vacation of this area is considered advisable at a later period.

15. During the short time available the Corps Commander wishes every effort made to prepare the main line of resistance for defence, on the lines indicated at the Conference held at 2nd Division Headquarters yesterday, 3rd December, 1917.

16. Please acknowledge.

G. F. BOYD,
B.G.G.S.,
V. Corps.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 21

CAMBRAI 1917

47th (LONDON) DIVISION OPERATION ORDER No. 205[1]

4th December, 1917.

1. (*a*) In conjunction with the movements of the 2nd and 59th Divisions the 47th Division will withdraw to-night from the Bourlon position to the Hindenburg Support Line.

(*b*) The positions to be occupied by the three Divisions consists of the main Hindenburg Support Line as far as Hughes Switch thence along this Switch to the Canal crossing and thence across to the old British line. In front of this line a series of Strong Points will be held as an outpost position, along the various spurs, probably two on each Division front.

The front allotted to this Division is from the Graincourt Road to the Canal inclusive.

2. *Method of withdrawal.*

An outpost line will be established along our present line at dusk and will be withdrawn at 4 a.m. Main body of front brigade to be clear by 3 a.m. of the Graincourt—La Justice Line which will be held by separate troops probably for 24 hours as a covering position for the withdrawal and consolidation of the main position.

3. G.O.C. 142nd Brigade will arrange for the withdrawal from the front line and is responsible for all measures of precaution up to the Graincourt—La Justice position. He will take special measures for covering his left flank co-ordinating his retirement with the right of the 2nd Division. On completion of withdrawal he will occupy the main position with his Brigade establishing H.Q. at K.15.d.5.3. [Near Canal 1 m. N.W. of Havrincourt.]

G.O.C. 140th Brigade will hold the Graincourt—La Justice position with one battalion and will provide troops for the two strong points in front of the main position.

The 141st Brigade will withdraw to-night under orders issued later.

4. C.R.A. will make all arrangements for the withdrawal of the artillery, retiring Sections of Batteries at a time to positions if possible protecting both the main position and the covering position.

[1] See Sketch 19.

Digitized by Google

5. C.R.E. will detail one company Pioneers to each Strong Point and will be responsible for the destruction of dug-outs, withdrawal of R.E. stores, construction of new dumps and will have all Field Companies and R.W.F. (except as above) for these purposes.

6. The D.M.G.O. in consultation with G.O's. C. 140th and 142nd Brigades will arrange for machine gun barrage as follows :—

(*a*) To cover withdrawal.

(*b*) Protection of La Justice Position.

(*c*) The holding of the Hindenburg Line.

7. R.W.F. will vacate the Hindenburg Line as soon as 142nd Brigade is established under orders of Divisional H.Q. when they will move to S.E. Havrincourt.

8. *Transport.* Instructions will be issued later. No moves will take place by day. No rations will be sent up to front line to-night. Rations for 140th Brigade and 142nd Brigade will be dumped in positions they are going to occupy tomorrow.

9. *Medical.* Verbal instructions have been issued. Adv. Dr. St. Havrincourt. Main Dr. St. Trescault.

10. *General Instructions.*

Destruction of all captured guns will be carried out under the C.R.A. forthwith. All material and stores as far as possible will be withdrawn; that left will be destroyed, destruction being carried out after an hour to be notified later. Forward of La Justice Line under 142nd Brigade—in rear of this line under C.R.E.

All telephone lines will be reeled up and nothing is to be said of this operation on the telephone.

11. Acknowledge.

Issued at 11.15 a.m.

ADDENDA

1. Artillery must be ready to cover our line up to as late as possible and the greatest care must be taken that the troops are not left unprotected by artillery until the latest possible moment.

2. Rear parties of the outpost line must be within 500 yards of the La Justice position by 6 a.m. 8th December so that our artillery may be free to act in front of the line.

This does not prevent special parties whose position is known to the artillery being sent out.

Digitized by Google

3. No demolitions will take place before 4.30 a.m.

4. The Factory E.29.a. [sugar factory on Bapaume—Cambrai road] is being held by troops of the 2nd Division until 5.30 a.m.

5. The La Justice position will be held at least until night 5th/6th and possibly later.

6. The withdrawal of the main body of the front Brigade will commence at 11 p.m. by which hour La Justice position and Strong Points must be occupied.

7. The 3 Companies Pioneers will in the first instance be utilized as the garrisons of the Strong Points.

A. J. TURNER,
Lt.-Colonel,
General Staff,
47th (London) Division.

4th December, 1917.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 22

THIRD ARMY

TOTAL ACTUAL CASUALTIES REPORTED

20TH NOVEMBER—8TH DECEMBER 1917

Division	Killed		Wounded		Missing		Total	
	O.	O.R.	O.	O.R.	O.	O.R.	O.	O.R.
Guards ...	29	373	90	1,875	10	671	129	2,919
2nd	14	281	57	1,253	14	622	85	2,156
3rd	5	73	15	360	—	12	20	445
4th	4	55	14	284	—	2	18	341
6th	28	262	84	1,260	3	232	115	1,754
12th ...	22	159	48	995	8	215	78	1,369*
15th ...	3	32	5	184	—	4	8	220
16th ...	12	129	33	698	1	20	46	847
20th ...	28	210	80	1,493	40	1,113	148	2,816
24th ...	5	31	9	114	—	4	14	149
29th ...	32	407	123	2,619	29	1,206	184	4,232
34th ...	4	37	4	69	—	1	8	107
36th ...	24	166	57	1,236	8	143	89	1,545
40th ...	48	422	98	1,958	28	756	174	3,136
47th ...	15	305	118	2,425	12	627	145	3,357
51st ...	24	220	44	1,384	6	179	74	1,783
55th ...	15	134	56	870	78	2,106	149	3,110
56th ...	6	88	35	520	4	86	45	694
59th ...	15	219	59	1,051	3	94	77	1,364
61st ...	19	219	69	996	20	701	108	1,916
62nd ...	40	451	113	2,378	6	486	159	3,315
1st Cav. ...	4	49	22	203	1	29	27	281
2nd Cav. ...	6	40	21	392	—	22	27	454
3rd Cav. ...	—	2	1	4	—	—	1	6
4th Cav. ...	11	31	21	217	6	182	38	430
5th Cav. ...	9	45	26	255	—	76	35	376
Other Units	21	131	68	956	20	620	109	1,707
Royal Flying Corps ...	18	2	38	9	36	12	92	23
Tank Corps	24	93	139	716	25	156	188	965
Total ...	485	4,666	1,547	26,774	358	10,377	2,390	41,817

* The return of the 12th Div. is obviously incomplete. A later return, for the period 16th Nov.–5th Dec. (inclusive), shows 230 officers and 4,606 other ranks bringing the grand total to 2,542 officers and 45,054 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

APPENDIX 23

CAMBRAI 1917

SKELETON ORDER OF BATTLE OF BRITISH TROOPS

(INFANTRY, CAVALRY, TANKS)

Guards Division (Major-General G. P. T. Feilding) :
1 Gds., 2 Gds., 3 Gds. Brigades.

2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira) :
5, 6, 99 Brigades.

6th Division (Major-General T. O. Marden) :
16, 18, 71 Brigades.

12th (Eastern) Division (Major-General A. B. Scott) :
35, 36, 37 Brigades.

20th (Light) Division (Major-General W. Douglas Smith) :
59, 60, 61 Brigades.

29th Division (Major-General Sir B. de Lisle) :
86, 87, 88 Brigades.

36th (Ulster) Division (Major-General O. S. W. Nugent) :
107, 108, 109 Brigades.

40th Division (Major-General J. Ponsonby) :
119, 120, 121 Brigades.

47th (2nd London) Division (Major-General Sir G. F. Gorringe) :
140, 141, 142 Brigades.

51st (Highland) Division (Major-General G. M. Harper) :
152, 153, 154 Brigades.

55th (1st West Lancashire) Division (Major-General H. S. Jeudwine) :
164, 165, 166 Brigades.

56th (1st London) Division (Major-General F. A. Dudgeon) :
167, 168, 169 Brigades.

59th (2nd North Midland) Division (Major-General C. F. Romer) :
176, 177, 178 Brigades.

61st (2nd South Midland) Division (Major-General C. J. Mackenzie) :
182, 183, 184 Brigades.

62nd (2nd West Riding) Division (Major-General W. P. Braithwaite) :
185, 186, 187 Brigades.

1st Cavalry Division (Major-General R. L. Mullens) :
1, 2, 9 Cavalry Brigades.

2nd Cavalry Division (Major-General W. H. Greenly) :
3, 4, 5 Cavalry Brigades.

Digitized by Google

4th Cavalry Division (Major-General A. A. Kennedy) :
Sialkot, Mhow, Lucknow Brigades.

5th Cavalry Division (Major-General H. J. M. Macandrew) :
Secunderabad, Ambala, Canadian Brigades.

Tank Corps (Br.-General H. J. Elles) :
I. II. III. Brigades.

APPENDIX 24

CAMBRAI 1917

ORDER OF BATTLE OF GERMAN INFANTRY

3rd Guard Division :
Guard Fus. ; Lehr Regt. ; Gren. Regt. No. 9.

20th Division :
Regts. Nos. 77, 79, 92.

28th Division :
Fus. Regt. No. 40 ; Gren. (Body) Regt. No. 109 ; Gren. Regt. No. 110.

30th Division :
Regts. Nos. 99, 105, 143.

34th Division
Regts.Nos. 30, 67, 145.

54th Division :
Regt. No. 84 ; Res. Regts. Nos. 27, 90.

107th Division :
Res. Regts. Nos. 52, 227, 232.

119th Division :
Regts. Nos. 46, 58 ; Res. Regt. No. 46.

183rd Division :
Regts. Nos. 184, 418 ; Res. Regt. No. 440.

185th Division :
Regts. Nos. 65, 161 ; Res. Regt. No. 28.

208th Division :
Regts. Nos. 25, 185 ; Res. Regt. No. 65.

214th Division :
Regts. Nos. 50, 358, 363.

220th Division :
Regt. No. 190 ; Res. Regts. Nos. 55, 99.

221st Division :
Regt. No. 41 ; Res. Regt. No. 60 ; Res. Ersatz Regt. No. 1.

Digitized by Google

9th Res. Division :
Regt. No. 395 ; Res. Regts. Nos. 6, 19.

21st Res. Division :
Res. Regts. Nos. 80, 87, 88.

24th Res. Division :
Res. Regts. Nos. 104, 107, 133.

49th Res. Division :
Res. Regts. Nos. 225, 226, 228.

20th Landwehr Division :
Landwehr Regts. Nos. 384, 386, 387.

9th Bavarian Reserve Division :
Bav. Res. Regts., Nos. 11, 14 ; Bav. Ersatz Regt. No. 3.

APPENDIX 25

THE MARK IV. TANK (" MALE ")

Length	26′ 5″
Width	13′ 6″[1]
Height to top of tracks	8′ 2″
Spanning power	10′ 0″
Weight, fully equipped	28 tons[1]
Maximum thickness of plate armour	12-mm.
Engine	6 cyl. 105 h.p. Daimler
Maximum speed	3·7 m.p.h.
Average speed	2 m.p.h.
Petrol capacity	70 gallons
Estimated mileage without refilling	35
Radius of action	15 miles or 7·5 hours
Armament	two 6-pdrs., 4 Lewis guns[1]
Crew	1 officer, 7 other ranks

[1] The " Female " was 10 ft. 6 ins. wide, weighed 27 tons and carried 6 Lewis guns (no 6-pdrs.).

Digitized by Google

Air attack on aerodrome, 99
Air bombing of distant objectives, 30, 133, 149, 265
Air combats, 265
Air forces (R.F.C.), reinforcement of, 30; withdrawal of, 169; lessons, 287
Air reconnaissance, 36, 168, 176, 230
Air support of infantry, 57, 58, 133, 195, 287
Air support of infantry, German, 121, 177, 197, 202, 204, 206, 215
Albrecht, Gen. (Lewarde Group), 159, 174
Alderman, Major W. J., 52
Allenby, Gen. Sir Edmund (Third Army), 5
Americans at Gouzeaucourt, 187
Anderson, Br.-Gen. A. T. (C.R.A., 62nd Div.), 59, 151
Anneux, capture of, 112
Anti-aircraft plan, 27
Anti-tank measures, German, 289, 291
Artillery, allotment of, 24, 25; instructions for opening bombardment, 25; ammunition requirements, 37; assembly of, 42; forward movement of, 62, 68, 72, 75, 77, 87, 109, 112, 121; in subsidiary operations, 94; in attacks on Bourlon front, 123, 125, 127, 129, 132, 148, 149, 151, 153; defensive arrangements, 172, 173; in German counter-stroke, 176, 177, 179, 186, 190, 192, 193, 196, 197, 200, 203, 206, 208, 209, 211, 212, 215, 219, 223, 225, 231, 235, 239, 240, 246, 251, 252, 255; reinforcements, 221; in withdrawal to Flesquières line, 260, 262, 263; loss in guns, 273; in Welsh Ridge action, 275; success of new tactics, 278; in mobile warfare, 287. *See also* Unregistered artillery fire, *etc.*
Artillery boards, 11

Bailey, Br.-Gen. V. T. (142nd Bde.), 214
Baker-Carr, Col. C. D'A. B. S. (I. Tank Bde.), 27, 34
Baldwin, Lieut.-Col. R. H., 199
Banbury, Br.-Gen. W. E. (61st Bde.), 53, 204.
Banteux ravine, 62, 165, 166, 167, 171; German penetration at, 178
Battye, Lieut.-Col. C. W., 145
Beale-Browne, Br.-Gen. D. J. E. (2nd Cav. Bde.), 80, 105
Bearing pickets, 11, 12
Beckwith, Br.-Gen. A. T. (153rd Bde.), 56, 108
Below, Gen. Otto v., 15, 274
Benson, Br.-Gen. R. P. (C.R.A., V. Corps), 246
Benzie, Lieut.-Col. R., 131
Best, Lieut.-Col. T. A. D., 87
Bourlon-Moeuvres front, defence of, 215, 247, 251
Bourlon village, entered, 130, 131, 138, 139, 145, 157
Bourlon Wood (and ridge), importance of, 17, 18; plans to secure, 22; decision to press attacks, 116; fighting for, 129, 137, 146, 155; end of attacks, 158; bombarded with gas, 167, 212, 226; defence of, 214
Boyd, Br.-Gen. G. F. (B.G.G.S., V. Corps), 246
Boyd Moss, Br.-Gen. L. B. (165th Bde.), 177
Bradford, Br.-Gen. R. B., V.C. (186th Bde.), 84, 85, 86, 111, 113, 156, 224
Bragg, Lieut. (Professor), W. L., 11
Braithwaite, Major-Gen. W. P. (62nd Div.), 59, 84, 86, 121, 150
Bridges, 30; construction of, 21, 97; demolition of, 97, 107, 108, 165, 255
Broadway, Lieut. N. H., 233
Brown, Br.-Gen. P. W. (71st Bde.), 54
Bruchmüller, Lieut.-Col., 16
Buchanan, Br.-Gen. K. G. (154th Bde.), 109
Bullecourt, attack at, 97
Bullen-Smith, Br.-Gen. G. M. (5th Bde.), 216, 264
Burn, Br.-Gen. H. P. (152nd Bde.), 56, 108, 126, 128
Burne, Lieut.-Col. E. R. (XV. Bde., R.H.A.), 173, 204
Burnett-Stuart, Br.-Gen. J. T. (B.G.G.S., VII. Corps), 169
Butler, Major-Gen. R. H. K. (Deputy C.G.S.), 123, 290

Digitized by Google

Byng, Gen. Hon. Sir Julian (Third Army), 5 ; approves new tactics, 7 ; his expectations, 8, 279 ; 9, 12 ; his plans, 17, 18 ; his battlefront,, 23 ; orders defensive for III. Corps, 107 ; 117, 123, 134, 139, 148, 150 ; ends Bourlon attacks, 158 ; 165 ; reluctant to yield ground, 245 ; 256, 257 ; view of German intentions, 270 ; explains cavalry delay, 281 ; his dispositions for offensive, 283 ; explains neglect of canal crossings, 284 ; reports on German counter-stroke, 294 ; his defensive measures, 298; his criticism of machine-gunners, 301 ; advocates more wire, 302; 304. *See also* Third Army.

Calibration of guns, 11, 286
Callwell, Major-Gen. Sir Charles, 295
Cambrai battle, description of area, 1 ; first proposals for, 4, 7 ; plans, 8, 9, 17 ; forces available, 19, 24, 27, 30 ; training, 32 ; preparations, 35 ; initial assault, 50 ; exploitation, 64 ; end of British attacks, 158 ; the defensive position, 164 ; German counter-stroke, 176 ; withdrawal to Flesquières line, 257 ; the end, 268 ; the results, 273 ; forces engaged, 273 ; casualties, 273 ; success of new tactics, 278 ; exploitation problems, 279 ; effective German resistance, 282 ; failure in exploitation, 283 ; value of experience gained, 286 ; shock of German counter-stroke, 293 ; investigation of German success, 293 ; reasons of German success, 298. *See also* Byng, Gen. Hon. Sir Julian *and* Third Army.
Camouflage, 36
Campbell, Lieut.Commander A. U., 276
Campbell, Br.-Gen. C. L. K. (5th Cav. Bde.), 188
Campbell, Br.-Gen. J. (121st Bde.), 129, 139
Canal du Nord, 1, 17, 19 ; fighting on, 86, 113, 122, 132, 147, 159. *See also* Bourlon-Moeuvres front, defence of
Canal, St. Quentin, 1 ; an obstacle, 19 ; description of crossings, 30 ; fighting on, 64, 68, 101, 164, 205, 244, 250, 253
Cantaing, capture of, 110 ; defence of, 246
Caporetto disaster, 9, 15
Casualties : British, 20th Nov., 88 ; total, 20th Nov.–8th Dec., 273, 382 ; in Welsh Ridge action, 30th–31st Dec., 277
Casualties, German, total, 273
Cavalry, rôle, 8, 17, 20 ; first movements of, 46, 63 ; at Masnières, 69, 71 ; crossing of canal, 70, 71 ; advance near Cantaing, 78 ; near Flesquières, 81 ; at capture of Cantaing, 110 ; dismounted battalions, 134, 136, 146, 167, 237 ; at Gouzeaucourt, 189 ; at Gauche Wood, 191, 238 ; south of Gauche Wood, 230 ; lack of enterprise, 281 ; neglect of canal crossings, 283 ; failure of counter-attacks, 304. *See also* Mounted action *and* Cavalry Corps.
Champion de Crespigny, Br.-Gen. C. R. (1st Guards Bde.), 189, 238
Charsley, Major R. B., 204
Cheape, Br.-Gen. G. R. H. (86th Bde.), 75, 102, 205, 206, 207, 208, 244
Christie, Br.-Gen. H. W. A. (C.R.A. 20th Div.), 53, 252
Clare, Pte., G. W., V.C., 167
Coke, Br.-Gen. E. S. D'E. (169th Bde.), 123, 219
Coleridge, Br.-Gen. J. F. S. D. (188th Bde.), 275
Command, exercise of, 284
Concealment, 40
Co-ordination, lack of, 223, 283, 285, 286
Cope, Br.-Gen. T. G. (176th Bde.), 213
Corbyn, Lieut.-Col. E. C., 239
Corner Work, captured, 53 ; lost, 269
Couillet Wood, cleared, 55
Courage, Col. A. (II. Tank Bde.), 27
Craufurd, Br.-Gen. G. S. G. (18th Bde.), 64, 83
Craven, Br.-Gen. A. J. (C.E., V. Corps), 246
Crèvecoeur, attack on, 103
Crozier, Br.-Gen. F. P. (119th Bde.), 129

Daly, Major-Gen. A. C. (24th Div.), 96, 167, 177
Darell, Br.-Gen. W. H. V. (D.A. & Q.M.G., IV. Corps), 22
Davidson, Br.-Gen. J. H. (G.H.Q.), 69
Dawson, Lieut.-Col. W. R. A., 199
Defence scheme, new British, 271
Degoutte, Gen. (French XXI. Corps), 24, 91

Digitized by Google

Delaforce, Br.-Gen. E. F. (C.R.A., 6th Div.), 54
de Lisle, Major-Gen. Sir Beauvoir (29th Div.), 63, 67, 107, 170, 187, 205, 209, 244, 245
De Pree, Br.-Gen. H. D. (B.G.G.S., IV. Corps), 7, 8, 22
Derby, Rt. Hon. Earl of, 294
de Rougemont, Br.-Gen. C. H. (C.R.A., 63rd Div.), 275
Deverell, Major-Gen. C. J. (3rd Div.), 97
Dudgeon, Major-Gen. F. A. (56th Div.), 97, 122, 220
Dummy figures, 95, 96, 97
Dummy tanks, 95, 97
Duncan, Br.-Gen. F. J. (60th Bde.), 53, 202

Elkington, Br.-Gen. R. J. G. (C.R.A., 56th Div.), 122
Elles, Br.-Gen. H. J. (Tank Corps), 5, 6; approves Cambrai area, 7; 13, 15, 26; his Special Order of the Day, 47; leads advance, 54; 290
Elliott-Cooper, Lieut.-Col. N. B., V.C., 198
Emerson, 2/Lieut. J. S., V.C., 269
Endurance of troops, 285
Engineer preparations for offensive, 38; operations, 90, 162, 237, 262; shortage of material and labour, 279. *See also* Bridges.
Enquiry, Court of, 297
Erskine, Br.-Gen. J. F. (141st Bde.), 214
Evans, Br.-Gen. W. K. (182nd Bde.), 250
Exploitation of success, difficulties, 279; German theory, 285

Fanshawe, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Edward (V. Corps), 90, 223, 246, 257, 258, 259
Fascines for tanks, 15, 291
Feilding, Major-Gen. G. P. T. (Guards Div.), 135, 150, 153, 224, 239
Fergusson, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Charles, Bt. (XVII. Corps). 98
Flash spotting, 12
Flesquières, check at, 58, 63, 82; occupied, 108; cause of failure at, 280
Flesquières line, orders for withdrawal to, 259, 260; work on, 260; withdrawal to completed, 265; last encounter near, 265; 293
Flot Farm, 74, 75, 104
Fontaine, capture of, 111; loss of, 120; attacks on, 126, 153
Forbes-Robertson, Lieut.-Col. J., 210
Forces engaged, British, 273
Forces engaged, German, 273
Fougasses, 96
Fowke, Lieut-Gen. Sir George (Adjt.-Gen., G.H.Q.), 297, 298
Freeth, Br.-Gen. G. H. B. (167th Bde.), 220
French guns in action, 251
French participation, proposed, 23; postponed, 90
Fuller, Br.-Gen. C. G. (B.G.G.S., III. Corps), 21, 170, 279
Fuller, Lieut.-Col. J. F. C., 5, 6, 15, 282

Gage, Br.-Gen. M. F. (Lucknow Bde.), 79, 230, 231
Gas bombardments, 98, 121, 167, 175, 210, 212, 213, 226
Gas discharges, 95, 97, 98, 214, 255
Gas casualties, 214, 246, 264
Gauche Wood, loss of, 186; attack on, 191; recapture of, 238
Geddes, Br.-Gen. J. G. (C.R.A., IV. Corps), 22
Gee, Captain R., V.C., 207
G.H.Q., 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 18, 35; advanced operations centre, 91; 106, 115; moves up reinforcements, 135, 221; 168, 222, 294, 295, 297
German (*Second*) Army, dispositions, 20th Nov., 47; suspects British attack, 48, 49; reinforcement of, 48; admits surprise, 99; fresh reinforcement measures, 100; fears a "break-in," 118; reinforcements, 21st Nov., 118; reliefs and reinforcements, 141; reorganizes front, 159, 173; attack preparations, 174; attack orders, 175; counter-stroke, 30th Nov., 226; its limited success, 227; plans for 1st Dec., 228, 248; orders consolidation, 271
Gielgud, Lieut.-Col. H. L. F. A., 197
Gillemont Farm, attack on, 95
Gobind Singh, Lce.-Dafadar, V.C., 235
Gonnelieu, loss of, 192; attacks on, 226, 241
Gordon, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Alexander (IX. Corps), 297
Gorringe, Major-Gen. Sir George (47th Div.), 167, 214
Gort, Lieut.-Col. Viscount, 242

Digitized by Google

Gough, Gen. Sir Hubert (Fifth Army), 4, 270
Gourley, Sergt. C. E., V.C., 177
Gouzeaucourt, loss of, 186 ; recapture of, 190
Greenly, Major-Gen. W. H. (2nd Cav. Div.), 70, 71, 78, 140, 146
Griffith, Br.-Gen. C. R. J. (105th Bde.), 122

Haig, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas, approves early plans for offensive, 4, 5 ; his views on tanks, 5, 290 ; approves Third Army plan, 8, 9 ; sends troops to Italy, 9 ; his views on help for Italy, 10 ; comments on Third Army plan, 17 ; his suggestions for Bourlon advance, 18, 280 ; agrees to French participation, 23 ; at tank-infantry training, 34 ; postpones French participation, 90 ; approves resumption of offensive, 21st Nov., 91 ; closes III. Corps offensive, 107, 115 ; decides to press Bourlon attack, 115, 285 ; visits Bourlon front, 123, 150 ; on divisional control, 126 ; urges use of dismounted cavalry, 134 ; hopes for mounted action, 139 ; his Orders of the Day, 141, 230 ; his orders for Bourlon front, 148 ; reinforces Third Army, 221 ; calls on French assistance, 222 ; orders withdrawal to Flesquières line, 257, 305 ; his reasons, 258 ; his lack of trained drafts, 261 ; on results of offensive, 274 ; 282, 283 ; his 1917 policy, 286 ; 293 ; reports on German counter-stroke, 294, 295 ; orders Court of Enquiry, 297 ; on training of machine-gunners, 301
Haig, Br.-Gen. N. M. (Mhow Bde.), 232, 233, 235, 236
Haldane, Lieut.-Gen. J. A. L. (VI. Corps), 13, 23, 136, 212
Hambro, Br.-Gen. P. O. (D.A. & Q.M.G., III. Corps), 21
Hampden, Br.-Gen. Viscount (185th Bde.), 59, 113
Hanstein, Lieut.-Gen. Freiherr v. (*20th Landwehr Div.*), 47
Hardress-Lloyd, Col. J. (III. Tank Bde.), 6, 27
Harper, Major-Gen. G. M. (51st Div.), 56, 111, 120
Havenstein, Major-Gen. (*107th Div.*), 48
Hayes, Lieut.-Col. G., 187
Henty, Major G. H., 192
Hickie, Major-Gen. W. B. (16th Div.), 97
Higgins, Br.-Gen. J. F. A. (III. Bde., R.F.C.), 30
Hildermann, Lieut.-Gen. (*9th Res. Div.*), 48
Hindenburg "Line," description of, 2
Hindle, Lieut.-Col. R., 181
Hutchinson, Br.-Gen. A. R. H. (190th Bde.), 275
Hutier, Gen. v. (*Eighteenth Army*), 16
Hyslop, Br.-Gen. H. H. G. (59th Bde.), 64

Incledon-Webber, Br.-Gen. A. B. (37th Bde.), 51, 199
Infantry, training with tanks, 32 ; concentration, 43 ; assembly, 46 ; fighting order, 68, 285 ; co-operation with tanks, 287 ; prowess in defence, 303
Innes, Captain W. K., 245
Italy, help for, 9, 115, 123, 258, 260, 274

James, Br.-Gen. C. H. L. (177th Bde.), 213
James, Lieut.-Col. C. P., 179
Jeudwine, Major-Gen. H. S. (55th Div.), 95, 116, 167, 171, 176, 180, 182, 295, 297, 300
Johnson, Major W. R., 171
Johnston, Lieut.-Col. K. A., 72

Kathen, Gen. v. (Busigny Group), 173, 174
Kavanagh, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Charles (Cavalry Corps), 20, 28, 134, 139, 182, 232, 235, 237, 270
Keeling, Major B. F. E. (3rd Field Survey Coy., R.E.), 12
Kellett, Br.-Gen. R. O. (99th Bde.), 216
Kennedy, Major-Gen. A. A. (4th Cav. Div.), 232, 235
Kennedy, Br.-Gen. H. B. P. L. (140th Bde.), 214
Kennedy, Lieut.-Col. W., 130
Kiggell, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Launcelot (C.G.S.), 8, 10, 158, 257, 298
Kirkpatrick, Lieut.-Col. H. F. (189th Bde.), 275
Kite balloons, 30
Knoll, The, attack on, 95
Kuhl, Gen. v. (Chief of Staff to Crown Prince Rupprecht), 174

Digitized by Google

Labour, 40, 279
Lascelles, Captain A. M., V.C., 253, 254
Lateau Wood, captured, 52; lost, 199
La Vacquerie, captured, 53; lost, 252
Lawrie, Major-Gen. C. E. (63rd Div.), 275, 276
Leadership, subordinate, 296
Lecky, Major-Gen. R. St. C. (M.G.R.A., Third Army), 9
Legard, Br.-Gen. D. A. (9th Cav. Bde.), 106
Lens, projected attack at, 8
Le Quennet Farm, captured, 52; lost, 199
Leroy, Major T. E., 269
Les Rues des Vignes, attack on, 102, 104
Les Rues Vertes. *See* Masnières
Leveson-Gower, Br.-Gen. P. (49th Bde.), 98
Lewis, Br.-Gen. F. G. (166th Bde.), 178, 235
Liddell, Major-Gen. W. A. (C.E., Third Army), 9, 38
Lille, projected attack against, 6
Linton, Lieut.-Col. W. S., 70
Lloyd George, Rt. Hon. D., 10
Loch, Br.-Gen. G. C. (168th Bde.), 219
Loseby, Captain C. E., 207
Lucas, Br.-Gen. C. H. T. (87th Bde.), 73, 102, 209, 244, 250
Lucas lamp, 84
Ludendorff, Gen., admits surprise, 99; 100, 118; promises reinforcements from Russia, 141; confers with Rupprecht, 174; 227, 274, 275, 305

Macandrew, Major-Gen. H. J. M. (5th Cav. Div.), 70, 74, 78, 183, 191, 230
McAulay, Sergt. J., V.C., 154
McBeath, Lce-Cpl. R., V.C., 57
Machine-gun companies, reorganization of, 29
Machine Gun Corps, expansion of, 301
Machine-gunners, criticism of, 294, 301
Machine guns, in offensive, 29, 153; in German counter-stroke, 181, 185, 186, 190, 192, 197, 198, 200, 202, 205, 206, 210, 212, 214, 215, 216, 219, 231, 244, 246, 252
Mackenzie, Major-Gen. C. J. (61st Div.), 249
Macmillan, Major J. B., 204
McReady-Diarmid, Captain A., V.C., 218, 247
Makins, Br.-Gen. E. (1st Cav. Bde.), 110
Maps, 11
Marcoing, capture of, 65; counter-attack from, 208; defence of, 253
Marden, Major-Gen. T. O. (6th Div.), 54, 83, 250, 252, 254
Marshall, Br.-Gen. T. E. (C.H.A., IV. Corps), 22, 27
Marwitz, Gen. v.d. (*Second Army*), 47, 118, 141, 174, 227, 248, 272, 305
Masnières, 20th Nov., 64, 68; occupied, 101; defence of, 206, 244; evacuation of, 245; re-occupied by Germans, 250.
Maurice, Major-Gen. F. B. (D.M.O., War Office), 295
Maxse, Lieut.-Gen. I. (XVIII. Corps), 297, 298
Medical arrangements, 42
Milner, Rt. Hon. Lord, 10
Moeuvres, attacks on, 114, 122, 132
Montgomery, Br.-Gen. H. M. de F. (D.A. & Q.M.G., V. Corps), 246
Mortars, in offensive, 29
Morton, Major G. D., 178
Moser, Lieut.-Gen. v. (Arras Group), 49, 100, 141, 159, 160, 174, 175, 212, 228, 272
Mounted action, 65, 70, 72, 75, 76, 77, 110, 189, 191, 233, 234
Mullens, Major-Gen. R. L. (1st Cav. Div.), 80, 123

Nelson, Br.-Gen. H. (88th Bde.), 68, 69, 72, 101, 102, 208, 209, 244
Nicholson, Br.-Gen. G H. W. (C.R.A., 40th Div.), 124
Nine Wood, occupied, 76
Nivelle, Gen., 4
Noyelles, occupied, 77; defence of, 105
Nugent, Major-Gen. O. S. W. (36th Div.), 61, 122

O.H.L., 99, 141, 226, 229, 271
Oil, discharges, 96
Oldfield, Br.-Gen. L. C. L. (C.R.A., 51st Div.), 56
Orival Wood, 267
Owen, Br.-Gen. C. S. (36th Bde.), 51, 192, 193, 197, 198

Pam Pam Farm, captured, 51; lost, 199
Pank, Lieut.-Col. C. H., 220
Paton, Captain G. H. T., V.C., 241

Digitized by Google

Paul, Captain W., 188
Pereira, Major-Gen. C. E. (2nd Div.), 152, 215
Pereira, Br.-Gen. G. E. (47th Bde.), 98
Perkins, Br.-Gen. A. E. J. (C.H.A., III. Corps), 21, 27
Perreau, Br.-Gen. A. M. (C.R.A., 55th Div.), 172
Pétain, Gen., 5, 9, 10; plans French participation, 23; 24, 90, 91; moves up French troops, 222
Phosphorus (P) bombs, 263
Pinney, Major-Gen. R. J. (33rd Div.), 297
Plumer, Gen. Sir Herbert (Second Army), 9
Plunkett, Lieut.-Col. J., 131, 137
Ponsonby, Major-Gen. J. (40th Div.), 124, 138, 139, 140, 146
Potter, Br.-Gen. H. C. (9th Bde.), 97
Potts, Br.-Gen. F. (C.R.A., 36th Div.), 122
Preston Whyte, Major R. P., 204
Pulteney, Lieut.-Gen. Sir William (III. Corps), 19, 21, 107, 165, 225, 257, 258, 295, 301

Quentin Ridge, lost, 187; attacks on, 194, 225; recaptured, 240

Raids, British, 96
Raids, German, 44
Railways and railheads, 41, 286
Railways, light, 41
Ramsay, Br.-Gen. F. W. (48th Bde.), 98
Rankin, Br.-Gen. C. H. (Ambala Bde.), 191, 237
Rawlinson, Gen. Sir Henry, Bt. (Fourth Army), 4
Reinforcements, 221, 255; not asked for, 299
Reserves, employment of, 284
Ribècourt, captured, 55
Ricardo, Br.-Gen. A. St. Q. (109th Bde.), 61, 114
Roads, 39, 126, 164, 279
Robertson, Gen. Sir William (C.I.G.S.), 10, 91, 115, 116, 123, 148, 258, 260, 294, 295
Rochfort-Boyd, Lieut.-Col, H. C. (XVI. Bde., R.H.A.), 233
Roddick, Captain J. A., 178
Romer, Major-Gen. C. F. (59th Div.), 167, 213
Rosher, Lieut.-Col. J. B., 110, 254
Rupprecht, Crown Prince of Bavaria, 48; surprised at tank success, 99; orders canal crossings to be held, 118; 141, 142, 165; confers with Ludendorff, 174; his orders for counter-stroke, 174; 175, 227, 248, 271, 305
Ruthven, Major W. L., 250

Salient created by offensive, 164, 298
Schelde river, 1, 30. *See also* Canal St. Quentin
Schreiber, Br.-Gen. A. L. (C.E., III. Corps), 21, 107
Schüszler, Lieut.-Gen. v. (*183rd Div.*), 48
Scott, Major-Gen. A. B. (12th Div.), 51, 171, 196, 295, 297
Secrecy, 35
Seely, Br.-Gen. Rt. Hon. J. E. B. (Canadian Cav. Bde.), 69, 236
Sensée river, 1, 8, 17, 18, 20, 149, 278
Sergison-Brooke, Br.-Gen. B. N. (2nd Guards Bde.), 152, 153, 155
Seymour, Br.-Gen. Lord Henry (3rd Guards Bde.), 241
Shaw-Stewart, Lieut.-Commander P. H., 276
Shea, Captain J. P. L., 188
Sheppard, Rfmn. A. E., V.C., 54
Sherwood-Kelly, Lieut.-Col. J., V.C., 75
Signal communications, 36, 37, 62, 84, 287
Sillem, Major-Gen. A. F. (D.A. & Q.M.G., Third Army), 9
Sledges, 35
Smeltzer, Lieut.-Col. A. S., 200
Smith, Major-Gen. W. Douglas (20th Div.), 53, 194, 201, 295, 297
Smoke bombardments, 26, 27, 95, 96, 97, 98, 125, 152, 228
Smuts, Gen. Rt. Hon. J. C., 296
Snow, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Thomas D'O. (VII. Corps), 24, 95, 165, 167, 169, 171, 182, 184, 225, 251, 295, 298, 299, 300, 303
S.O.S. rifle grenade signal, 266, 301
Sound ranging, 11, 12
Spackman, Sergt. C. E., V.C., 74
Special Orders of the Day, 47, 141, 230
Spoil Heap, 2; capture of, 62
Spooner, Br.-Gen. A. H. (183rd Bde.), 249
Stansfield, Br.-Gen. T. W. (178th Bde.), 213
Stevenson, Br.-Gen. E. H. (C.R.A., 29th Div.), 68, 187

Digitized by Google

Stockwell, Br.-Gen. C. I. (164th Bde.), 95, 172, 180
Stone, Captain W. N., V.C., 216
" Story of a Great Fight ", 221
Strachan, Lieut. H., V.C., 72
Strauss, Major B. L., 226
Subsidiary operations, 94, 162
Supply arrangements, 40
Surprise, plan to secure, 6
Survey methods applied to gunnery, 11
Swinton, Lieut.-Col. E., 28

Tadpole Copse, capture of, 123 ; loss of, 220
Tancred, Br.-Gen. T. A. (C.R.A., III. Corps), 21, 165
Tank Corps, plans for offensive, 5, 6 ; threat to expansion, 13 ; lack of equipment and services, 290 ; plans for expansion, 290
Tank, Mark IV., 13, 385
Tank, Mark V., 14
Tank Medium A (Whippet), 14
Tanks, principles of employment, 14 ; trench trials, 15 ; speeds, 26 ; allotment, 27 ; deployment, 28 ; orders, 28 ; training with infantry, 32, 287 ; concentration, 44 ; assembly, 45 ; initial success, 50 *et seq.*, 278 ; at Flesquières, 58, 59, 82 ; on St. Quentin Canal, 64, 68. 73, 76 ; at Graincourt, 85 ; losses, 20th Nov., 90 ; near Flot Farm, 105 ; at Cantaing, 110 ; at Fontaine, 111, 127, 128, 153 ; in Bourlon Wood, 113, 128 ; in Bourlon village, 131, 138, 157 ; at Gouzeaucourt, 190, 280 ; at Gauche Wood, 238 ; at Quentin Ridge, 240, 282 ; total losses, 286, 287, 288 ; new models, 291
Tanks, supply, 28, 35
Tanks, wireless signal, 28
Tanks, wire-pulling, 28
Taylor, Br.-Gen. R. O'B. (187th Bde.), 59, 156, 158
Thomas, Br.-Gen. H. M. (C.R.A., 12th Div.), 51, 172
Thomas, Lce.-Cpl. J., V.C., 213
Tramways, 41
Troughton, Lieut.-Col. L. H. W., 202
Troyte-Bullock, Lieut.-Col. C. J. (60th Bde.), 194, 195
Tudor, Br.-Gen. H. H. (C.R.A., 9th Div.), 6, 7
Turner, Lieut.-Col. H. H. F., 233
Tyler, Br.-Gen. A. M. (C.H.A., V. Corps), 246

Unregistered artillery fire, 6, 10 ; advantages of, 10, 25; doubts of, 13, 47 ; success of, 88, 278

Vaughan, Major-Gen. L. R. (M.G.G.S., Third Army), 8, 9, 107, 169, 184, 279, 298
Villers Guislain, lost, 179 ; attack on, 232
Villers Hill, fighting for, 181, 232
Villers Ridge, attack on, 232
Vincent, Br.-Gen. B. (35th Bde.), 51, 171, 185, 186, 188, 189, 190, 192, 194, 196, 200, 227, 237, 256
Vincent's Force, 185, 188, 189, 237, 256

Wain, Captain R. W. L., V.C., 54
Walker, Br.-Gen. H. A. (16th Bde.), 54, 106, 195, 226, 250, 255
Wallace, Lieut. S. T. D., V.C., 193
Walsh, Br.-Gen. R. K. (6th Bde.), 217, 247
War Cabinet, requires troops for Italy, 9, 10 ; approves continuation of Bourlon attacks, 123 ; 148, 258 ; approves withdrawal, 260 ; on German counter-stroke, 294, 296
Warden, Lieut.-Col. H. L., 144, 145, 146, 147, 150
Warning order, 55th Div., 173
Water supplies, 38
Watter, Gen. Freiherr v. (Caudry Group), 47, 174
Watter, Lieut.-Gen. Freiherr v. (*54th Div.*), 47
Weather, 36, 45, 48, 49, 109, 120, 136, 144, 149, 152, 153, 225, 232, 249, 265, 275
Welsh Ridge, defence of, 205, 253, 256, 268, 275
West, Commander C. S., 276
Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany, 174
Williams, Major-Gen. H. Bruce (37th Div.), 13
Williams, Br.-Gen. S. F. (C.E., IV. Corps), 22
Wilson, Br.-Gen. F. A. (C.R.A., Guards Div.), 136, 151
Wire, 282, 302
Withycombe, Br.-Gen. W. M. (107th Bde.), 122, 132
Woollcombe, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Charles (IV. Corps), 7, 19, 22, 117, 120, 134, 150, 158, 212, 223, 246

Digitized by Google

INDEX TO ARMS, FORMATIONS AND UNITS

Armies—
First—170, 221, 222, 270
Second—9, 221, 270
Third—5, 7; plans for offensive, 8, 9, 17, 18; forces allotted, 19, 24; artillery instructions, 25; tank instructions, 27; R.F.C. tasks, 30; notes on tank and infantry training, 32; preparations, 35; concentration, 42; assembly, 45; initial assault, 50; situation, night 20th Nov., 88; orders for 21st Nov., 91, 94; orders to III. Corps, 21st Nov., 107; failure to exploit success, 116; continues Bourlon attacks, 116; ends Bourlon attacks, 158; warned of German preparations, 167, 168, 169; meets German counter-stroke, 182, 183, 188; reports to G.H.Q., 221; reinforcements for, 221, 255; lack of reserves, 222; orders to IV. Corps, 223; orders for counter-attack, 224; orders to tanks, 230; withdrawal to Flesquières line, 250; warning order, 270. *See also* Byng, Gen. Hon. Sir J.
Fourth—1, 4
Fifth—4, 9, 270

Artillery—
Batteries, Field—
A/XVII.—208; A, B, C/LXII.—197; A, B/LXIII.—193; C/LXIII.—192, 193; A/107th—179; D/276th—177; A, B, C, D/275th—179; A, D/281st—219; 92nd—208; 376th—179; 377th—192, 193; 378th—179; 379th—192, 193; 463rd—200
Batteries, R.H.A.—
H—80; I—110; L—204; B, Royal Cdn.—78, 103
Batteries, Heavy—
25th—192; 71st—179; 144th—197; 1/2nd Lancashire—187
Batteries, Siege—
32nd—179; 38th—179; 55th—194; 87th—211; 100th—190; 102nd—179; 107th—197; 110th—197; 129th—194; 166th—194; 210th—179; 254th—197; 354th—192; 2/1st Lancashire—211
Brigades, Field—
II.—54, 211; XVII.—54, 76, 104, 206, 208, 246, 255; XXIV.—54, 211; XXXVI.—215; XLI.—215; LXII.—51, 197, 252; LXIII.—51, 252; LXX.—56, 109, 151, 240; LXXIV.—136; LXXV.—136; LXXVII.—59, 151, 214; XCI.—53, 203, 252; XCII.—53, 203; XCIII.—59, 215; 150th—252; 153rd—59; 169th—51, 179, 192; 173rd—61; 178th—53; 179th—51, 200, 252; 181st—54; 232nd—51, 206, 208, 246, 255; 235th—240; 236th—240, 252; 255th—56; 256th—56; 277th—51, 169, 211; 280th—61; 306th—56, 151; 310th—59, 87; 312th—59
Brigades, R.H.A.—
III.—53; IV.—56; V.—56, 87, 151, 214, 255; VII.—219; XV.—53, 72, 102, 173, 203, 206; XVI.—54, 77, 169, 233, 235
Groups, Heavy Artillery—
XVII.—275; XXXIV.—179; L.—172

Cavalry—
Corps, rôle in offensive, 8, 20; 19, 41; concentration, 44; assembly, 46; first advance, 63, 69, 78; orders for 21st Nov., 92; 107; withdrawal ordered, 108; 134, 139, 148; location 29th Nov., 170; in German counter-stroke 182, 224, 230, 238, 251, 270

Digitized by Google

Divisions—
1st—rôle, 22; 29; assembly, 46; operations 20th Nov., 63, 75, 77, 80, 83, 92; 21st Nov., 93, 105, 108, 110, 117; 22nd–27th Nov., 124, 125, 134, 135, 140, 144, 149; relieved, 152; in German counter-stroke, 182, 183, 237; 280, 281
2nd—23, 24; assembly, 46; operations 20th Nov., 70, 78, 94; 21st–26th Nov., 108, 134, 135, 140, 146, 149, 152; 167, 170; in German counter-stroke, 182, 183, 188, 192, 237, 284
3rd—24, 44, 46, 141, 182, 184, 237
4th—24, 46, 108, 141, 170; in German counter-stroke, 183, 184, 224, 232, 237
5th—23, 44; assembly, 46; operations 20th Nov., 63, 69, 70, 74, 78, 94; 102, 141, 170; in German counter-stroke, 182, 183, 191, 224, 230, 235, 236, 238, 239; 284
Brigades—
1st—80, 81, 83, 105, 110, 111, 114, 125
2nd—80, 82, 105
3rd—79, 83, 108
4th—78, 108, 183
5th—79, 83, 108, 188, 189, 191
9th—81, 106, 134
Canadian—69, 70, 71, 78, 93, 102, 191, 236, 239
Ambala—78, 93, 108, 191, 231, 237, 238, 239
Lucknow—21, 24, 46, 79, 92, 93, 108, 224, 230, 233, 235, 236, 237, 238
Mhow—184, 232, 237
Secunderabad—74, 78, 93, 191, 237, 239
Sialkot—184
Regiments—
Dragoon Guards, 2nd (Queen's Bays), 110, 125
—, 4th (Royal Irish), 77, 78, 80, 81, 102, 106
—, 5th (Princess Charlotte of Wales's), 75, 80, 81
—, 7th (Princess Royal's), 74, 76, 239
Dragoons, 2nd (R. Scots Greys), 189
—, 6th (Inniskilling), 232, 233, 234, 236
Hussars, 8th (King's R. Irish), 191, 192
—, 11th (Prince Albert's Own), 110, 111, 114
—, 15th (The King's), 106, 134, 136, 146
—, 18th (Queen Mary's Own), 102, 105, 192
—, 19th (Queen Alexandra's Own), 106, 134
—, 20th, 189, 190, 191, 192
Lancers, 9th (Queen's Royal), 105
—, 12th (Prince of Wales's R.), 191
King Edward's Horse, 22, 46, 83, 84, 86, 111, 114
Bedfordshire Yeomanry, 106, 134
1/1st Northumberland Hussars, 21, 65, 181
Fort Garry Horse, 69, 70, 71, 72, 236
Lord Strathcona's Horse, 103, 191, 236, 239
Royal Canadian Dragoons, 103, 191
2nd Lancers (Gardner's Horse), 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237
9th Hodson's Horse, 191, 238
18th K.G.O. Lancers, 238, 239
29th Lancers (Deccan Horse), 231
36th Jacob's Horse, 231, 232, 236
38th K.G.O. Central India Horse, 234, 235, 236
Jodhpur Lancers, 231, 232, 236
Dismounted Battalions, 1st—136, 144, 147, 152
—, 2nd—136, 140, 147, 152
—, 3rd—152, 159, 167
—, 4th—152, 159, 167
—, 5th—152, 159, 167
—, 9th—137, 140, 144, 147, 152
Corps—
III.—4, 13, 18, 19, 20; plan, 21; initial assault, 51, 62; advance to canal, 64; situation, night 20th Nov., 89; orders for 21st Nov., 92; 101; orders defensive, 107; supports IV. Corps 27th Nov., 152; orders consolidation, 163; weakness of front, 166; 170; in German counter-stroke, 185, 223, 225, 238, 249, 252, 256, 268; orders withdrawal, 260; withdrawal, 263, 266
IV.—7, 8, 18, 19, 20; plan, 22; initial assault, 56; check in Bourlon advance, 80; situation, night 20th Nov., 89; orders for 21st Nov., 92; subsidiary operation, 97; operations Bourlon front, 108, 120, 144; 164, 168, 170; in German counter-stroke, 212, 223, 247; relieved by V. Corps, 246

Digitized by Google

V.—18; relieves IV. Corps, 246; in German counter-stroke, 251; orders withdrawal, 259; withdrawal, 263

VI.—19, 23; subsidiary operation, 97; operations 25th Nov., 147; 27th Nov., 159; 168, 251.

VII.—19, 24; subsidiary operations, 95; weakness of left flank, 166; maintains state of readiness, 173; in German counter-stroke, 176, 221, 223, 224, 225, 235, 237, 251

XVII.—19, 20, 24, 98, 162, 169, 170, 222

I. Anzac.—13

Cyclist Bn., III. Corps, 187

Divisions—

Guards—19, 43, 117, 134, 135, 136; operations 25th Nov., 146; 26th Nov., 149, 152; 27th Nov., 153; 158, 159, 167; casualties 25th–28th Nov., 167; 169; in German counter-stroke, 182, 188, 189, 213, 222, 224, 226, 230, 238, 243, 256, 269

2nd—135, 148, 149, 152, 159, 168; in German counter-stroke, 212, 215, 221, 223, 224, 226, 230, 246, 251, 255, 259, 260, 263, 264, 265, 267

3rd—19; subsidiary attack 20th Nov., 97; 168, 220

4th—19, 98

5th—222

6th—19, 21, 27, 28, 33, 43; assembly, 45; operations 20th Nov., 54, 62, 64, 65, 66, 82; 21st Nov., 106, 108, 110; 152; in German counter-stroke, 186, 187, 195, 210, 213, 246, 250, 254, 259, 260, 263, 266, 270, 281, 282

9th (Scottish)—221, 237, 255, 270

12th (Eastern)—19, 21, 27, 28, 33, 43; operations 20th Nov., 51, 62, 64, 89; 163, 164, 165, 166, 171, 172; in German counter-stroke, 185, 192, 227, 243, 249; 282, 300, 301, 302, 304

15th (Scottish)—19, 240

16th (South Irish)—19; subsidiary attack 20th Nov., 97; 222, 256, 270

19th—270

20th (Light)—19, 21, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 36, 43, 44; assembly, 45; operations 20th Nov., 51, 53, 62, 64, 89; 21st Nov., 92, 101, 102, 103; 22nd Nov., 163; 165, 173; in German counter-stroke, 186, 194, 199, 200, 201, 208, 225, 242, 249, 250, 252; 282, 300, 301, 302, 304

21st—184, 221, 237, 256, 260, 270

24th—19; subsidiary attacks 20th Nov., 96; 170; during German counter-stroke, 177, 179, 182, 237; 270

25th—221, 255

29th—19, 21, 22, 24, 27, 29, 33, 43; operations 20th Nov., 63, 67, 89; 21st Nov., 92, 101, 107, 108; 22nd–23rd Nov., 163, 164; 165, 172; in German counter-stroke, 187, 201, 203, 205, 223, 228, 244, 250, 253, 255; 263, 279, 282, 283, 285, 305

34th—8, 19

35th—8

36th (Ulster)—19, 22, 24, 36, 43, 44; operations 20th Nov., 61, 86, 87, 90; 21st Nov., 93, 114, 117; 22nd Nov., 122; 23rd Nov., 124, 131, 132; 24th Nov., 136; 25th Nov., 139, 144; 152, 169, 170, 222, 256, 263; operations 6th Dec., 269; 270, 281

40th—8, 19, 43, 90, 117, 124, 125; operations 23rd Nov., 124, 128, 129, 134, 135; 24th Nov., 136, 137, 140; 25th Nov., 144, 147; casualties, 23rd–25th Nov., 147; 222

47th (2nd London)—136, 148, 151, 158, 167; in German counter-stroke, 212, 214, 221, 223, 224, 228, 230, 240, 246, 251; 263, 264, 266, 267, 303

50th (Northumbrian), 8

51st (Highland)—19, 22, 28, 33, 34; assembly, 43; operations 20th Nov., 55, 56, 63, 67, 80, 82, 83, 89, 90, 93; 21st Nov., 92, 93, 108; 22nd Nov., 117, 120; 23rd Nov., 124, 126; 134; casualties 20th–23rd Nov., 135; 170, 222, 247, 251, 255, 264, 270, 280, 281

Digitized by Google

55th (1st West Lancashire)—19, 29, 44 ; subsidiary attacks 20th Nov., 95; 165, 166, 169, 171, 173 ; in German counter-stroke, 176, 196, 221, 225, 232, 233, 235, 237 ; 270, 295, 296, 297, 300, 301, 302, 304
56th (1st London)—19, 30, 88, 97 ; operations 21st Nov., 114 ; 22nd Nov., 117, 122 ; 23rd Nov., 124, 125, 133 ; 24th Nov., 136 ; 25th Nov., 147 ; 27th Nov., 159, 168 ; in German counter-stroke, 219, 221, 230, 247, 251, 303
59th (2nd North Midland)—19, 43, 117, 158, 159, 164, 167 ; during German counter-stroke, 211, 213, 223, 226, 246 ; 263, 266, 299
61st (2nd South Midland)—19, 169, 170, 184, 213, 222, 243 ; in German counter-stroke, 249, 252; 256, 268
62nd (2nd West Riding)—8, 19, 22, 28, 33, 37, 43 ; operations 20th Nov., 56, 59, 62, 82, 84, 89, 92 ; 21st Nov., 93, 111 ; 22nd Nov., 117, 121, 123, 124, 125 ; casualties 20th–22nd Nov., 125 ; 135, 147 ; operations 27th Nov., 149, 150, 151, 156 ; 159 ; 167 ; casualties 25th–28th Nov., 167 ; 169, 212, 280
63rd (Royal Naval)—275

Engineers (R.E.)—
Army Troops Company, 239th—192, 237
Field Companies—
12th—411 ; 69th—185 ; 70th—192, 193 ; 83rd—202 ; 87th—200 ; 416th—133 ; 419th—180 ; 422nd—180 ; 423rd—180 ; 455th—68, 105, 255 ; 459th—211; 469th—213; 470th—187 ; 497th—68, 207 ; 509th—255
Field Squadron, 5th—78
Field Survey Company, 3rd—12
Pontoon Park, No. 3—68
Special Brigade (Gas)—
No. 1 Special Coy.—97 ; No. 2 Special Coy.—97 ; G Special Coy—95 ; J Special Coy.—97 ; Q Special Coy.—96, 97
Topographical Section—12
Tramway Company, No. 2 (Army)—41
Tunnelling Companies—
174th—98 ; 180th—180 ; 181st—68 ; 252nd—264

Engineers (American)—
11th (Railway) Regt.—187

Flying Corps (R.F.C.)—
I. Brigade—149 ; III. Brigade—30
Squadrons, No. 15—215 ; No. 59—92 ; No. 68—195
Wing, Ninth—169

Infantry Brigades—
1st Guards—135, 138, 159, 189, 195, 238, 242, 269, 293, 303
2nd Guards—152, 153, 189, 192, 242
3rd Guards—135, 138, 146, 155, 159, 192, 195, 239, 240, 243
5th—216, 247, 251, 255, 264
6th—217, 226, 247
9th—97
16th—54, 106, 108, 173, 195, 211, 224, 226, 250, 251, 253, 254, 255, 263
17th—182
18th—64, 66, 82, 110, 186, 187, 211, 254, 263, 281
35th—51, 164, 171, 185, 188, 189, 194, 196, 227, 237
36th—51, 62, 164, 171, 181, 186, 192, 197, 198, 200
37th—51, 171, 181, 186, 193, 199
47th—98
48th—98
49th—98
59th—64, 69, 73, 92, 101, 103, 173, 202, 243
60th—53, 173, 194, 197, 198, 224, 225, 242
61st—53, 173, 203, 204, 243, 250
64th—256
71st—54, 66, 254, 255, 263
72nd—192
73rd—96, 182
86th—75, 78, 81, 102, 105, 164, 204, 205, 244, 250, 251, 253
87th—73, 76, 102, 104, 108, 172, 208, 244, 250, 251, 253
88th—68–73, 101, 108, 172, 208, 214, 244, 253, 255, 263, 303
99th—168, 216, 246, 247, 251, 264
107th—90, 114, 122, 131, 132
108th—90, 114, 122, 123, 132, 263
109th—61, 87, 114, 122, 269
119th—129, 137, 145, 147
120th—130, 137, 138, 139, 144
121st—129, 131, 134, 138, 144, 147
140th—214, 251, 264
141st—214, 264
142nd—214, 264
152nd—56, 82, 83, 108, 126, 264

Digitized by Google

153rd—56, 82, 83, 108, 121, 126, 264, 265
154th—90, 103, 109, 120, 126, 264
164th—95, 172, 180, 225, 237
165th—177, 180, 234, 270
166th—171, 172, 173, 178, 225, 235, 237
167th—220
168th—123, 133, 136, 147, 159, 210
169th—88, 123, 219
176th—213
177th—213, 263
178th—213, 263
182nd—250, 253, 256, 268
183rd—243, 249, 252, 268
184th—252, 269
185th—59, 113, 121, 152, 159, 224
186th—84, 93, 111, 147, 152, 156, 157, 159, 224, 260, 280
187th—59, 62, 120, 147, 156, 157, 159, 275
188th—275
189th—275

Infantry Regiments—

Coldstream Guards, 1st Bn.—153; 2nd Bn.—159, 190, 239; 3rd Bn.—190, 240
Grenadier Guards, 1st Bn.—159, 242, 243; 2nd Bn.—190, 238, 240; 3rd Bn.—153, 156; 4th Bn.—147, 155, 241
Irish Guards, 1st Bn.—190, 194, 240, 269; 2nd Bn.—153, 155
Scots Guards, 1st Bn.—154; 2nd Bn.—138, 146, 147
Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, 1/7th Bn.—109, 110; 1/8th Bn. 57, 109, 121, 126; 14th Bn.—130, 137, 146
Bedfordshire, 8th Bn.—54, 254
Berkshire, Royal, 1st Bn.—216, 264; 2/4th Bn.—252, 257, 269; 5th Bn.—51, 164, 196
Black Watch (Royal Highlanders), 1/6th Bn.—57, 109, 265; 1/7th Bn.—58, 82, 83, 126
Border Regiment, 1st Bn.—73, 75
Buffs (East Kent), 1st Bn.—54, 106, 226; 6th Bn.—52, 199
Connaught Rangers, 6th Bn.—98
Dublin Fusiliers, Royal, 2nd Bn.—98; 10th Bn.—98
Duke of Cornwall's L.I., 7th Bn.—53, 202, 204; 10th Bn.—218
Duke of Wellington's (West Riding), 2/4th Bn.—85, 86, 112; 2/5th Bn.—85, 86, 113, 157; 2/6th Bn.—85, 86, 113, 157; 2/7th Bn.—86, 112, 157
Durham L.I., 2nd Bn.—67, 188, 263; 11th Bn.—186, 187, 195, 205; 14th Bn.—67, 110, 211, 253
East Surrey, 7th Bn.—51, 199, 200; 9th Bn.—96; 13th Bn.—139, 144, 147, 150
Essex, 1st Bn.—69, 72, 101, 102, 105, 209; 9th Bn.—51, 171, 181, 196; 11th Bn.—66, 188; 13th Bn.—217, 218, 247
Gloucestershire, 2/4th Bn.—252; 2/6th Bn.—249, 252
Gordon Highlanders, 1/4th Bn.—109, 110, 120, 126; 1/5th Bn.—57, 109; 1/6th Bn.—57, 67, 83, 126, 127
Green Howards, 13th Bn.—131, 144
Hampshire, 2nd Bn.—69, 70, 72, 101, 209, 210, 254
Highland L.I., 2nd Bn.—247, 251, 255; 14th Bn.—138, 140, 144, 147
Inniskilling Fusiliers, Royal, 1st Bn.—73, 74; 9th Bn.—62, 87, 114, 269; 10th Bn.—62; 11th Bn.—87, 269.
Irish Fusiliers, Royal, 7th/8th Bn.—98; 9th Bn.—132.
Irish Rifles, Royal, 2nd Bn.—133; 8th Bn.—132; 10th Bn.—122; 12th Bn.—122; 14th Bn.—114; 15th Bn.—122, 132
King's (Liverpool), 1st Bn.—217, 247; 1/5th Bn.—177; 1/6th Bn.—177, 178, 234; 1/8th Bn. (Liverpool Irish)—95, 180, 181, 182; 1/9th Bn.—180, 182; 1/10th Bn. (Liverpool Scottish)—178, 181; 12th Bn.—53, 204
King's Own (R. Lancaster), 1/4th Bn.—95, 180, 183; 1/5th Bn.—138, 139, 144, 146; 11th Bn.—138, 139, 144, 146
King's Own Scottish Borderers, 1st Bn.—73, 76, 104, 105, 208, 214, 244
King's Own Yorkshire L.I., 2/4th Bn.—60; 2/5th Bn.—60, 157; 7th Bn.—53, 205
King's Royal Rifle Corps, 1st Bn.—168, 216; 10th Bn.—65, 69, 104, 202; 11th Bn.—69, 103, 202; 12th Bn.—53, 54, 194, 242
Lancashire Fusiliers, 1st Bn.—77, 105, 205, 245; 2/5th Bn.—95, 172, 180

Digitized by Google

Leicestershire, 1st Bn.—55 ; 2/5th Bn.—267 ; 11th Bn.—211
Leinster, 2nd Bn.—96
Lincolnshire, 2/4th Bn.—263, 266
London, 1/2nd Bn. (Royal Fus.)—219 ; 1/4th Bn. (Royal Fus.)—133, 147, 220 ; 1/5th Bn. (London Rifle Bde.)—123 ; 1/6th Bn. (Rifles)—214 ; 1/7th Bn. (City of London)—251 ; 1/8th Bn. (P.O. Rifles)—215, 251 ; 1/9th Bn. (Q.V.R.)—219 ; 1/12th Bn. (Rangers)—147, 159 ; 1/13th Bn. (Kensington)—159, 220 ; 1/14th Bn. (London Scottish)—123, 133, 147, 220 ; 1/15th Bn. (Civil Service R.)—215, 264 ; 1/16th Bn. (Q.W.R.)—123, 219 ; 1/17th Bn. (Poplar & Stepney)—214 ; 1/19th Bn. (St. Pancras)—214 ; 1/22nd Bn. (Queen's)—214 ; 1/28th Bn. (Artists R.)—277
Loyal North Lancashire, 1/4th Bn.—172, 180, 181 ; 1/5th Bn.—178, 181 ; 2/5th Bn.—95
Middlesex, 1/8th Bn.—220 ; 11th Bn.—52, 171, 181, 186, 189, 198 ; 13th Bn.—182, 183 ; 16th Bn.—76, 77, 106, 205–6, 207, 210, 244, 245 ; 17th Bn.—218, 247 ; 20th Bn.—131, 144; 21st Bn.—131, 144
Monmouthshire, 1/2nd Bn.—187, 192, 244, 246
Norfolk, 7th Bn.—51, 197, 198; 9th Bn.—55
Northamptonshire, 5th Bn.—186, 192, 241
North Staffordshire, 2/5th Bn.—213 ; 2/6th Bn.—226, 246
Northumberland Fusiliers, 1st Bn.—97
Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire L.I., 2nd Bn.—216, 264 ; 6th Bn.—53, 194, 226, 241
Queen's (R. West Surrey), 6th Bn.—52, 171, 181, 186, 200 ; 8th Bn.—96, 182
Rifle Brigade, 3rd Bn.—182 ; 10th Bn.—65, 101, 104, 202 ; 11th Bn.—64, 69, 73, 101, 103, 203, 204 ; 12th Bn.—54, 194, 226, 242
Royal Fusiliers, 2nd Bn.—76, 77, 105, 106, 206, 210, 245 ; 7th Bn.—276, 277 ; 8th Bn.—51, 52, 164, 198 ; 9th Bn.—51, 197, 198, 243 ; 17th Bn.—216, 217 ; 22nd Bn.—247, 251, 264 ; 23rd Bn.—216, 217, 251, 264 ; 24th Bn.—216, 264, 266
Royal Irish, 2nd Bn.—98
Royal Scots, 1/9th Bn.—120, 126
Seaforth Highlanders, 1/4th Bn.—111, 120 ; 1/5th Bn.—56, 57, 109, 126, 128 ; 1/6th Bn.—57, 58, 82, 126, 127, 128
Sherwood Foresters, 2nd Bn.—55, 263 ; 2/6th Bn.—211 ; 2/7th Bn.—263
Shropshire L.I., King's, 1st Bn., 54, 226, 251, 253, 254 ; 1/4th Bn.—277 ; 6th Bn.—54, 194, 195, 225, 226
Somerset L.I., 7th Bn.—54, 204
South Lancashire, 1/4th Bn.—180 ; 1/5th Bn.—173, 179, 185
South Staffordshire, 2nd Bn.—217, 218 ; 2/6th Bn.—226, 246
South Wales Borderers, 2nd Bn.—73, 74, 104, 244, 253, 254 ; 12th Bn.—129, 131, 137, 146
Suffolk, 7th Bn.—51, 171, 192, 197 ; 9th Bn.—55, 66, 73, 262 ; 12th Bn.—131, 138, 144
Sussex, Royal, 7th Bn.—51, 62, 164, 171, 198
Warwickshire, Royal, 1st Bn.—98 ; 2/5th Bn.—252, 256 ; 2/6th Bn.—256 ; 2/7th Bn.—253, 256, 269 ; 2/8th Bn.—256, 269
Welch, 17th Bn.—129, 137, 146 ; 18th Bn.—130, 131, 137, 146
Welch Fusiliers, Royal, 19th Bn.—129, 131, 137, 146
West Kent, Royal, 6th Bn.—52, 199, 200
West Yorkshire, 1st Bn.—66, 188, 263 ; 2/5th Bn.—60, 61, 158 ; 2/6th Bn.—60, 121 ; 2/7th Bn.—59, 60, 61, 121, 157 ; 2/8th Bn.—59, 121 ; 12th Bn.—97
Worcestershire, 4th Bn.—69, 70, 72, 101, 209, 244 ; 2/8th Bn.—249
York & Lancaster, 2nd Bn.—54, 226 ; 2/4th Bn.—61, 121 ; 2/5th Bn.—61, 122, 157

Infantry Battalions—
Royal Marines, 1st Bn.—276 ; Anson Bn.—276 ; Drake Bn.—276, 277 ; Hood Bn.—276 ; Howe Bn.—276 ; Nelson Bn.—276
Guernsey L.I., Royal, 1st Bn.—76 106, 206, 207, 208
Newfoundland, Royal—71, 74, 10 209, 253, 254

Labour Company, 51st Chinese—15 ,

Digitized by Google

Machine Gun Corps—
Batteries—
4th—78; 7th—153
Companies—
3rd—153; 4th—153; 6th—216; 11th—153; 35th—192, 197; 36th—198; 37th—200; 59th—202; 61st—205; 71st—263; 99th—216; 120th—139; 141st—214; 142nd—264; 164th—181; 204th—137; 217th—202; 235th—185, 186, 200; 242nd—216; 255th—213, 214
Squadrons—
2nd—80; 11th—233, 234; 12th—231; 14th—239

Tank Corps—
Battalions—
A—27, 28, 29, 53, 54, 65, 66, 68, 73, 75, 92, 104, 105, 189, 190, 231
B—27, 28, 29, 54, 65, 81, 92, 106, 110, 125, 126, 127, 128, 189, 191, 231
C—27, 51, 52, 125, 126, 127, 128, 151, 157
D—27, 57, 90, 125, 129, 131, 189, 240
E—28, 56, 90, 125, 132, 189, 240
F—27, 28, 51, 52, 64, 69, 103, 104, 105, 151, 154, 157, 158
G—28, 84, 85, 112, 125, 129, 130
H—27, 28, 54, 76, 111, 125, 126, 127, 128, 191, 231, 238, 240
I—27, 53, 59, 125, 126, 128, 136, 138, 151, 154
Brigades—
I.—27, 33, 34, 41, 44, 90, 93, 112, 125, 132, 170, 189, 195
II.—27, 33, 41, 44, 90, 92, 93, 109, 125, 170, 189, 224, 231
III.—6, 27, 28, 33, 41, 44, 51, 53, 90, 92, 103, 125, 151, 170

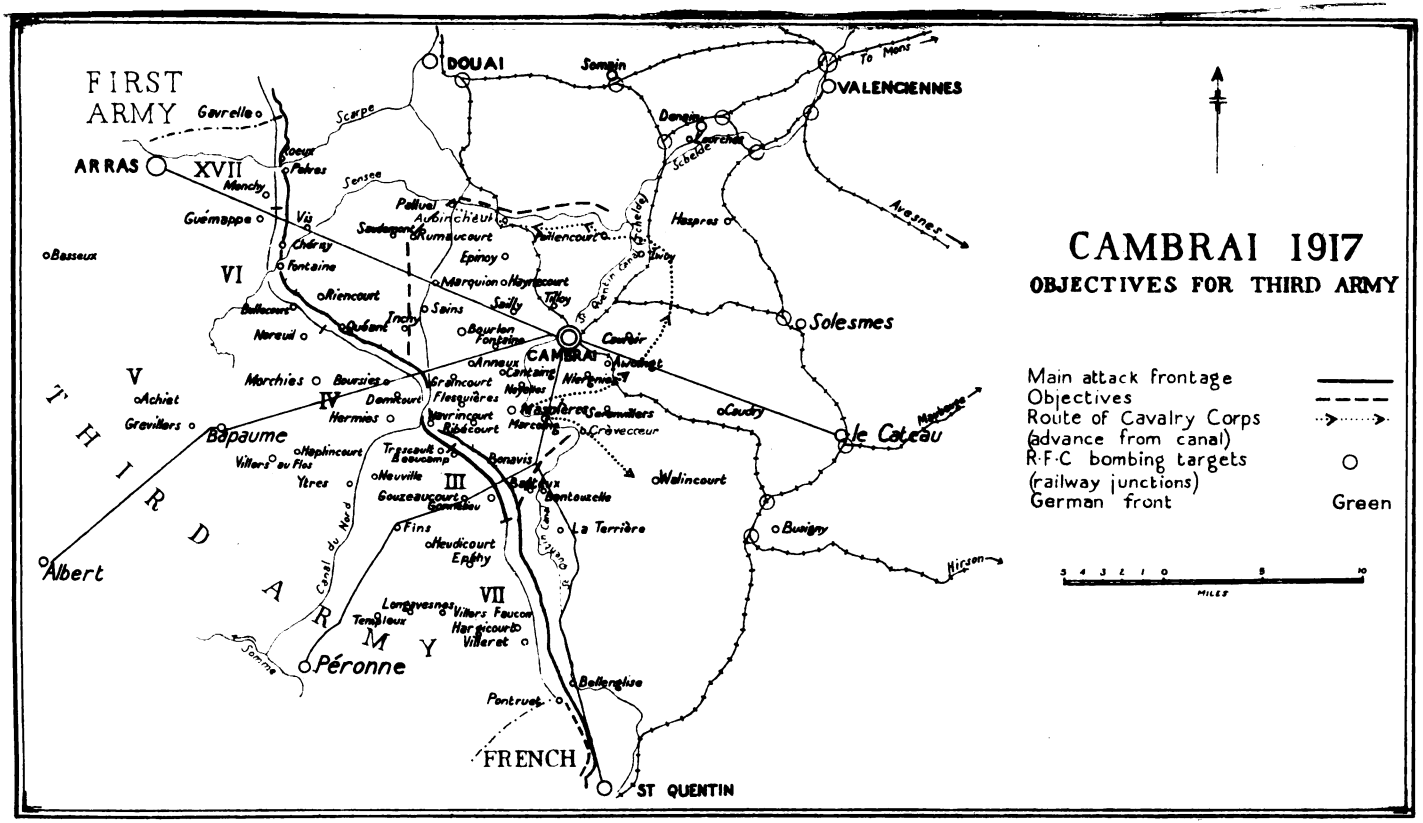
Trench Mortars—
121st Battery, 145

S.O. Code No. 70–532*

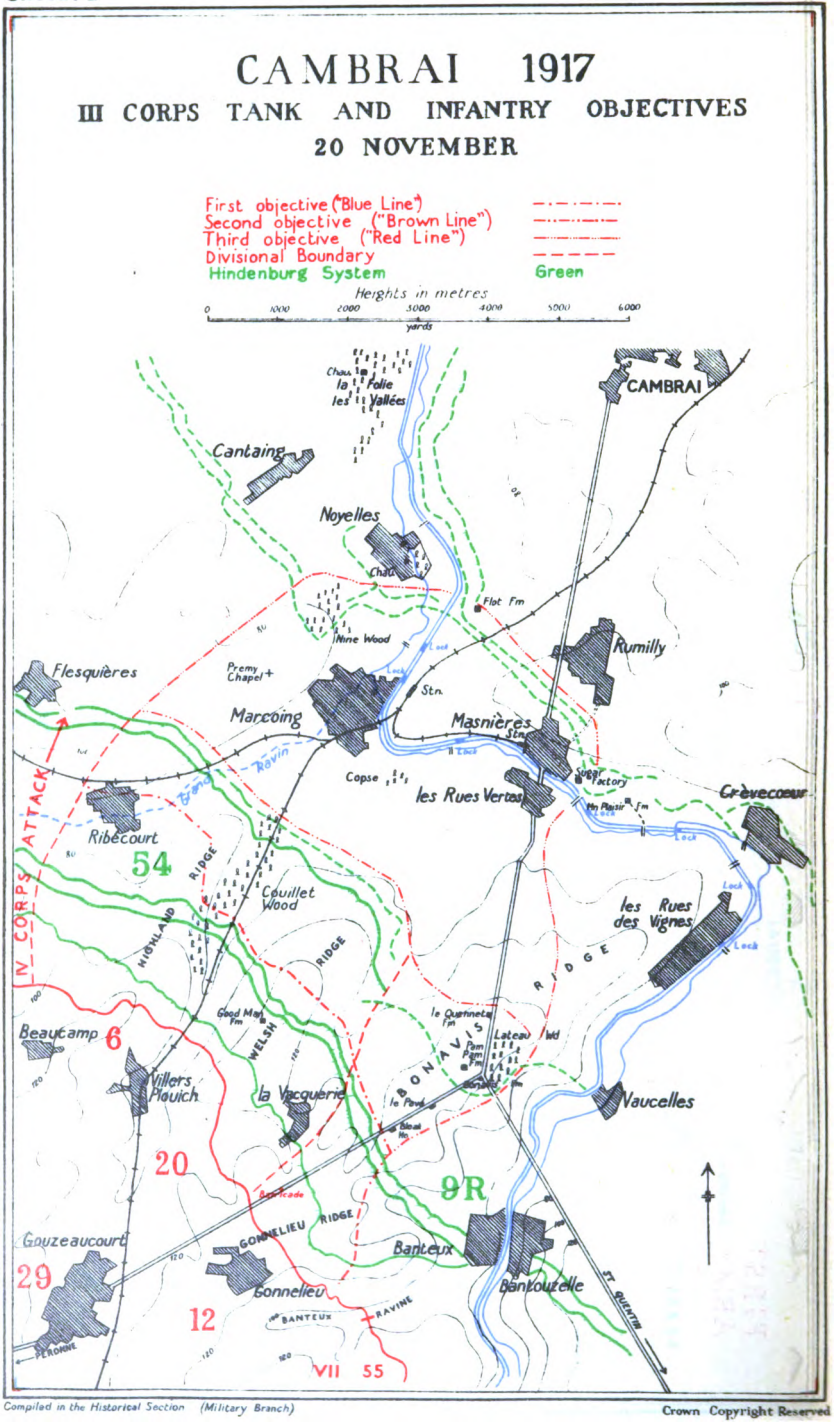
(23639) 3407 10/48 K.H.K. Gp. 8/8

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google


FIRST ARMY
THIRD ARMY
FRENCH
DOUAI
Somain
To Mons
VALENCIENNES
Denain
Aulnoy
Scarpe
Escaut
Schelde
AveSnes
ARRAS
Gavrelle
Roeux
Fampoux
Monchy
Sensee
Guémappe
Vis
Pelves
Aubigny au Bac
Hasnes
Basseux
Cherisy
Fontaine
Rumaucourt
Epinoy
Marquion
Haynecourt
Tilloy
Sailly
Inchy
Sains
Bourlon
Fontaine
Cambrai
Cauroir
Anneux
Cantaing
Nicourt
Noyelles
Solesmes
Bullecourt
Riencourt
Quéant
Noreuil
Marchies
Bourlies
Graincourt
Fleszières
Demicourt
Hermies
Havrincourt
Rémicourt
Marcoing
Crèvecoeur
Masnières
Les Rues des Vignes
Canal de la Sensée
Canal de l'Escaut
Canal du Nord
Canal de la Somme
Canal de la Haute Deule
Canal de la Deule
Canal de la Lys
Canal de la Marne au Rhin
Canal de la Meuse au Rhin
Canal de la Marne à la Saône
Canal de la Saône à la Rhône
Canal de la Rhône au Rhône
Canal de la Rhône au Rhône
Canal de la Rhône au

Sketch 2



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

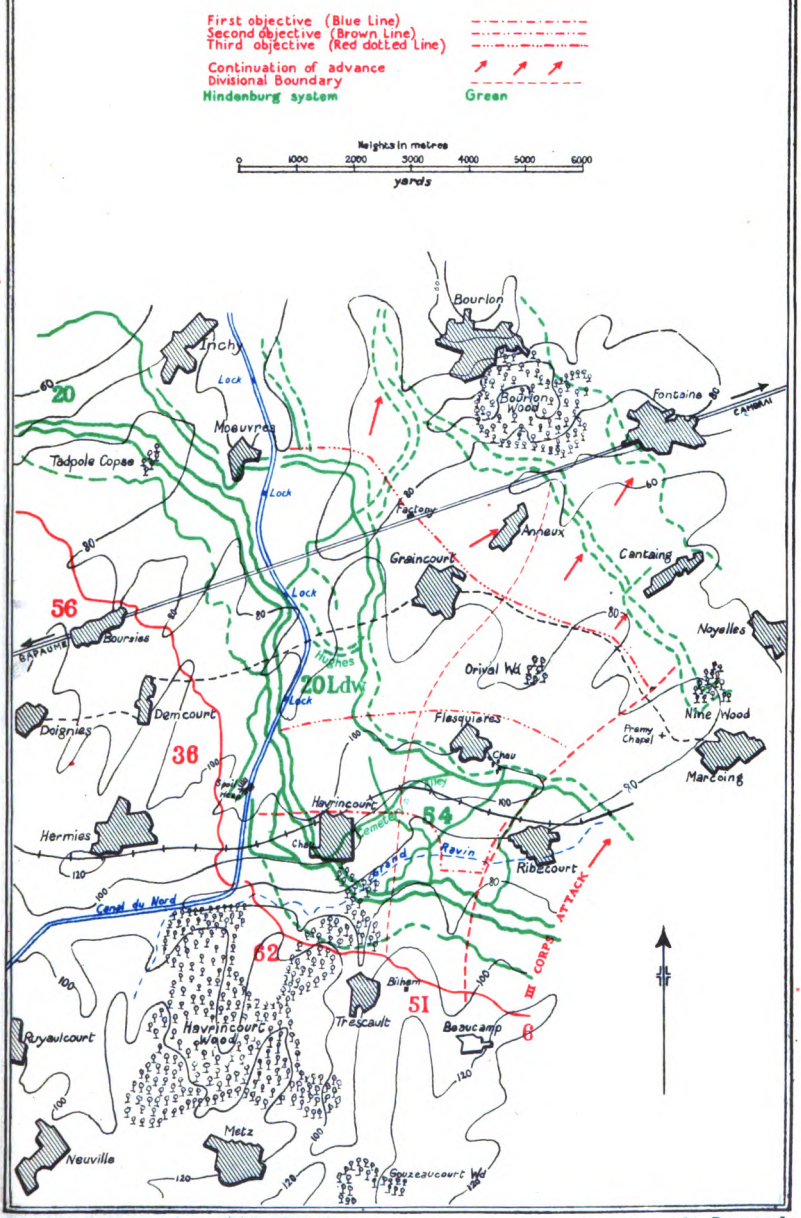
Digitized by Google

Sketch 3

CAMBRAI 1917

IV CORPS TANK AND INFANTRY OBJECTIVES

20 NOVEMBER



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

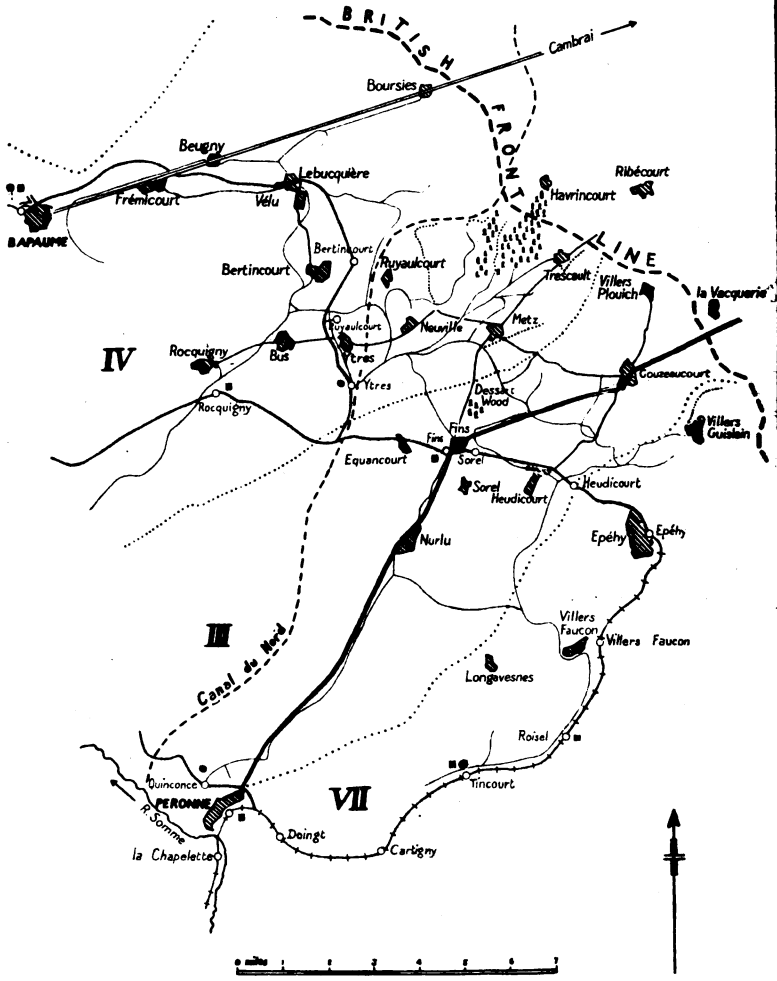
Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google

Sketch 4

CAMBRAI 1917

RAILHEADS AND FORWARD ROADS



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

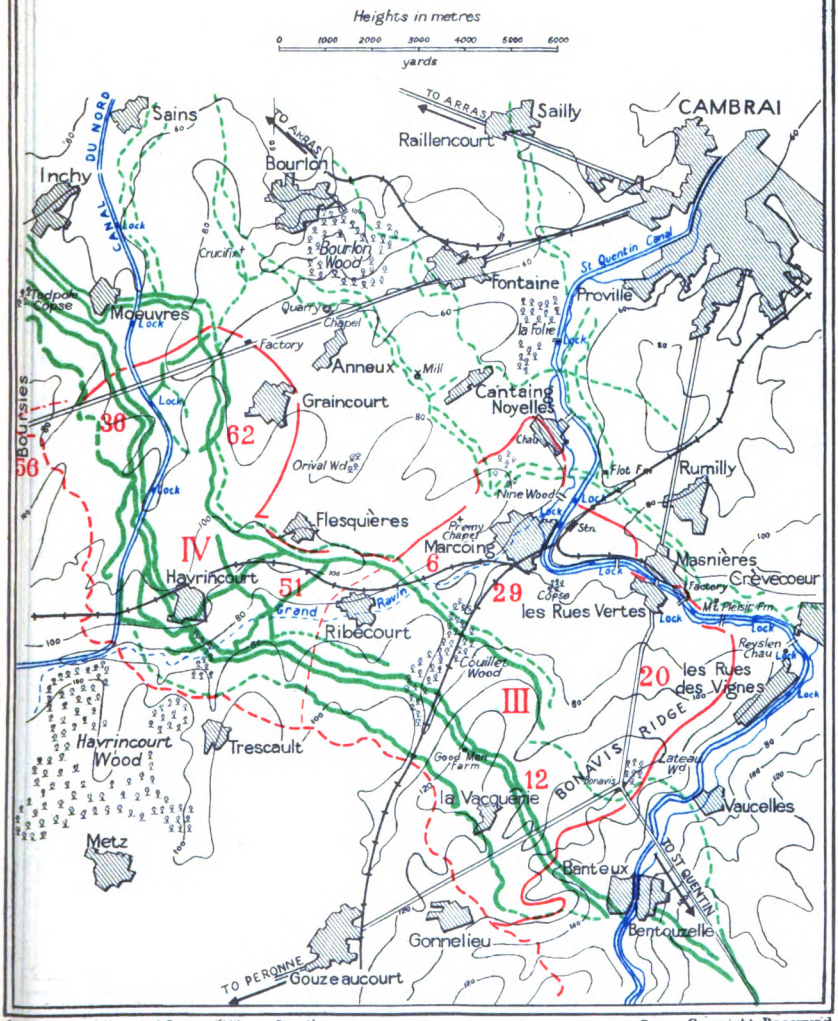
Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google

CAMBRAI 1917

SITUATION 20 NOVEMBER

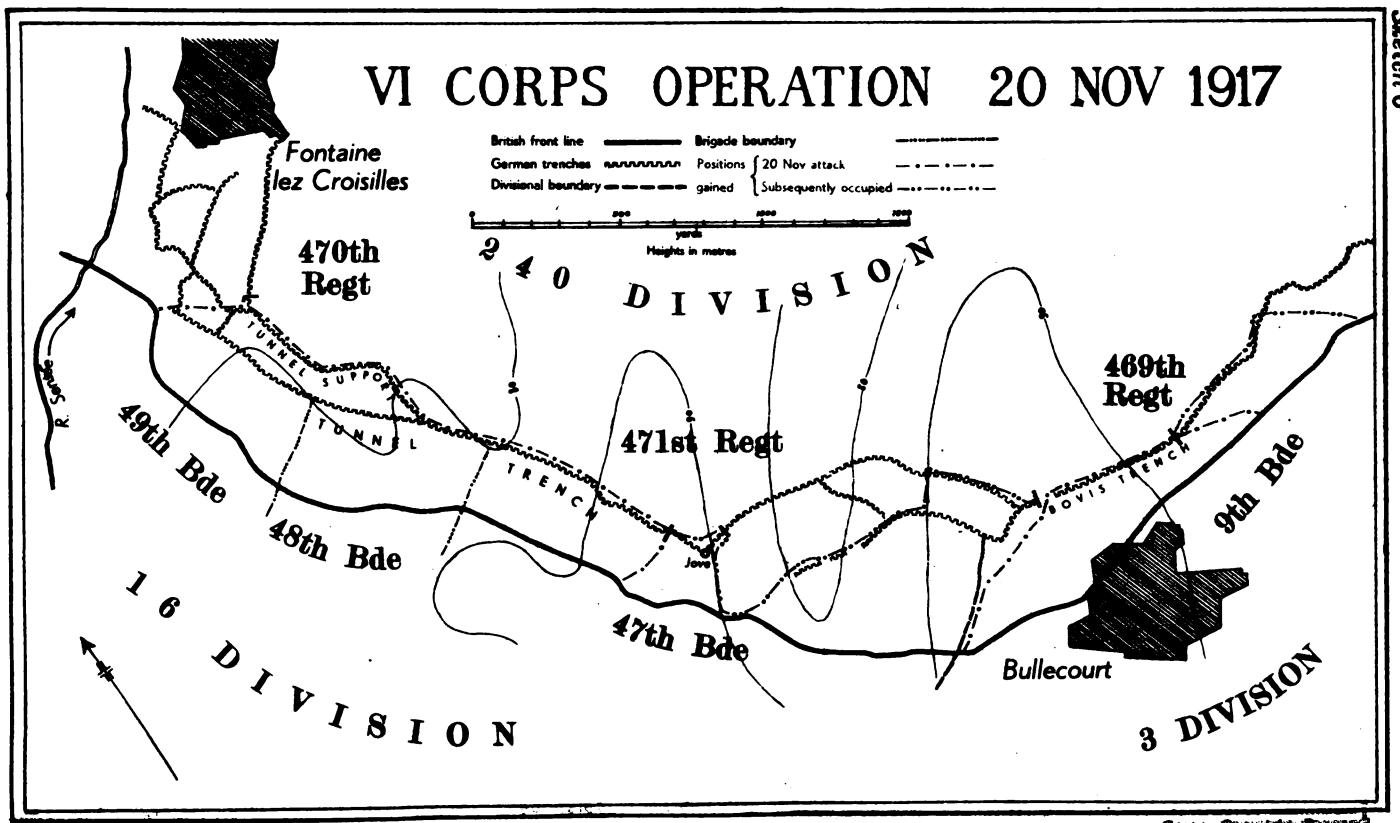
British front at zero hour ------
British front at nightfall ——————
Corps boundary - - - - - -
Defensive flank -.-.-.-.-
Hindenburg system Green



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google



Sketch 6

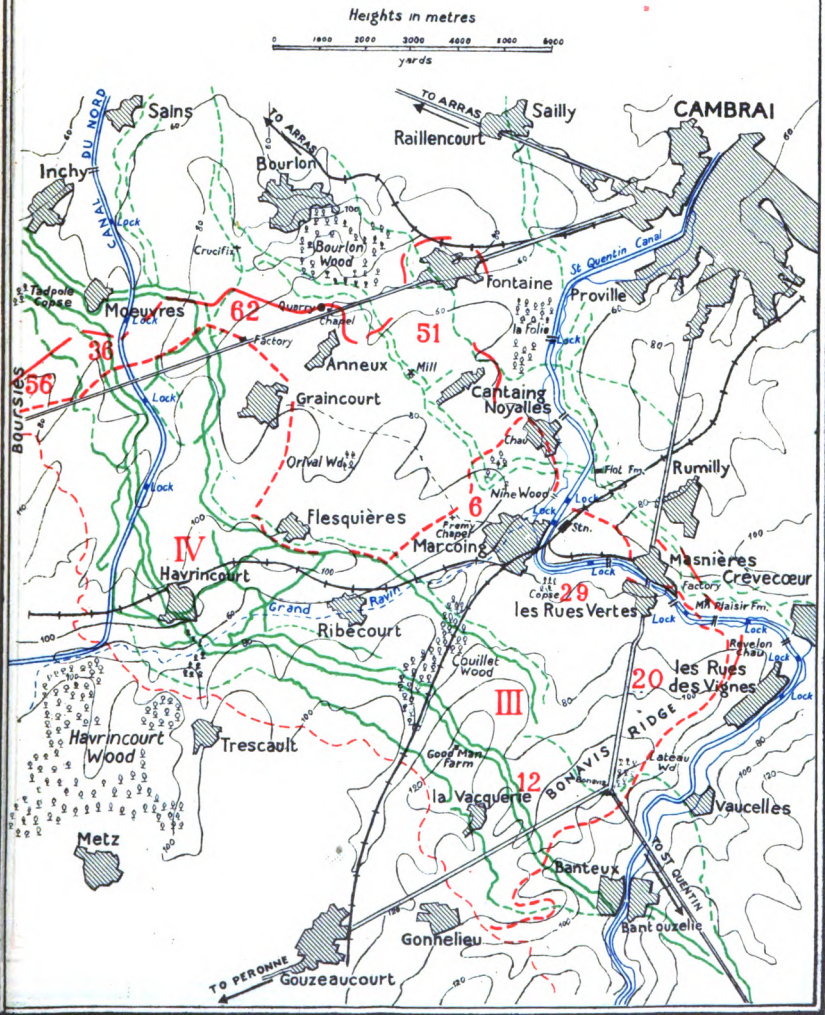
Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google

CAMBRAI 1917

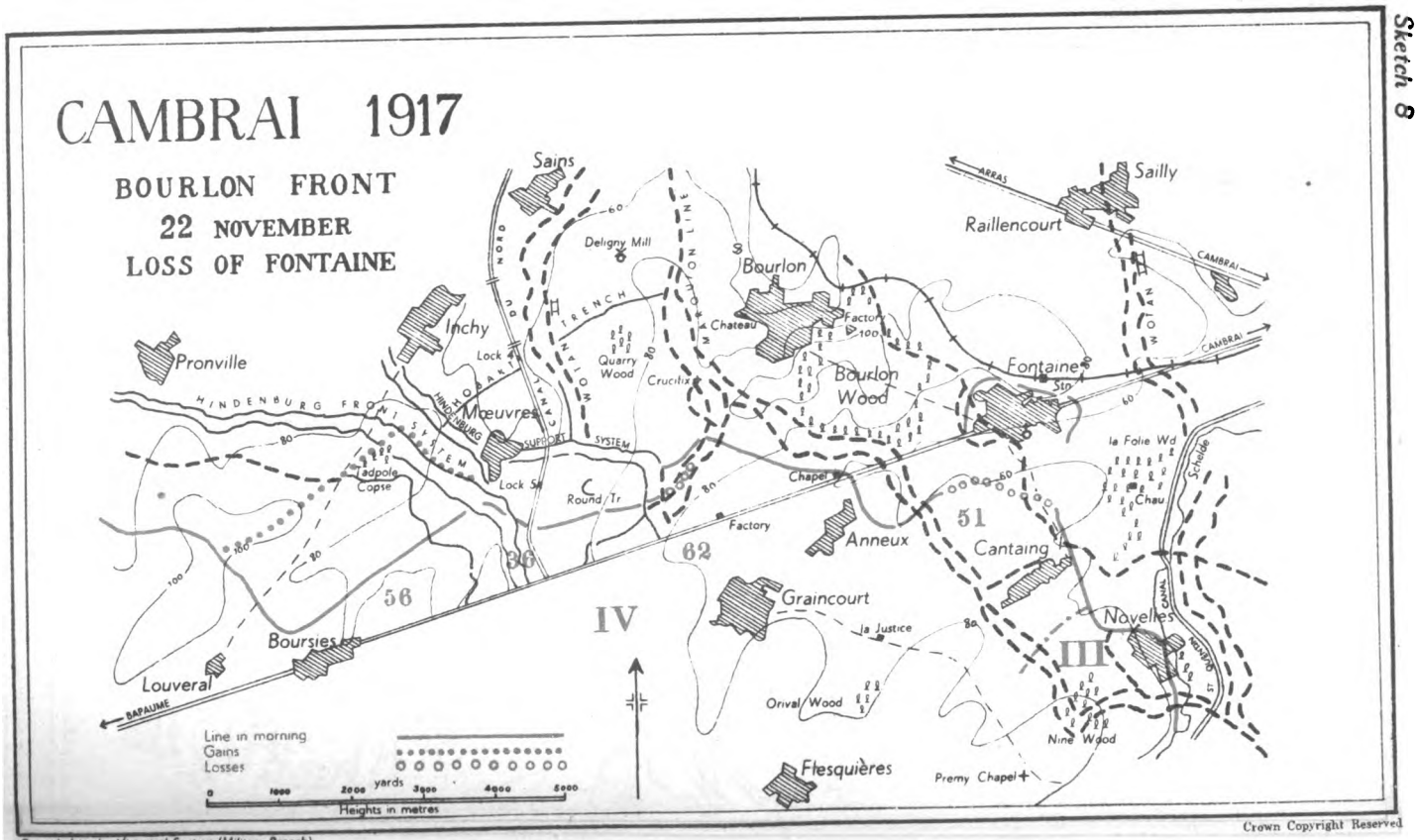
SITUATION 21 NOVEMBER

British Line:
Zero hour 20 Nov. ------
Nightfall 20 Nov. ------
Advanced during 21 Nov. ——
Hindenburg system Green

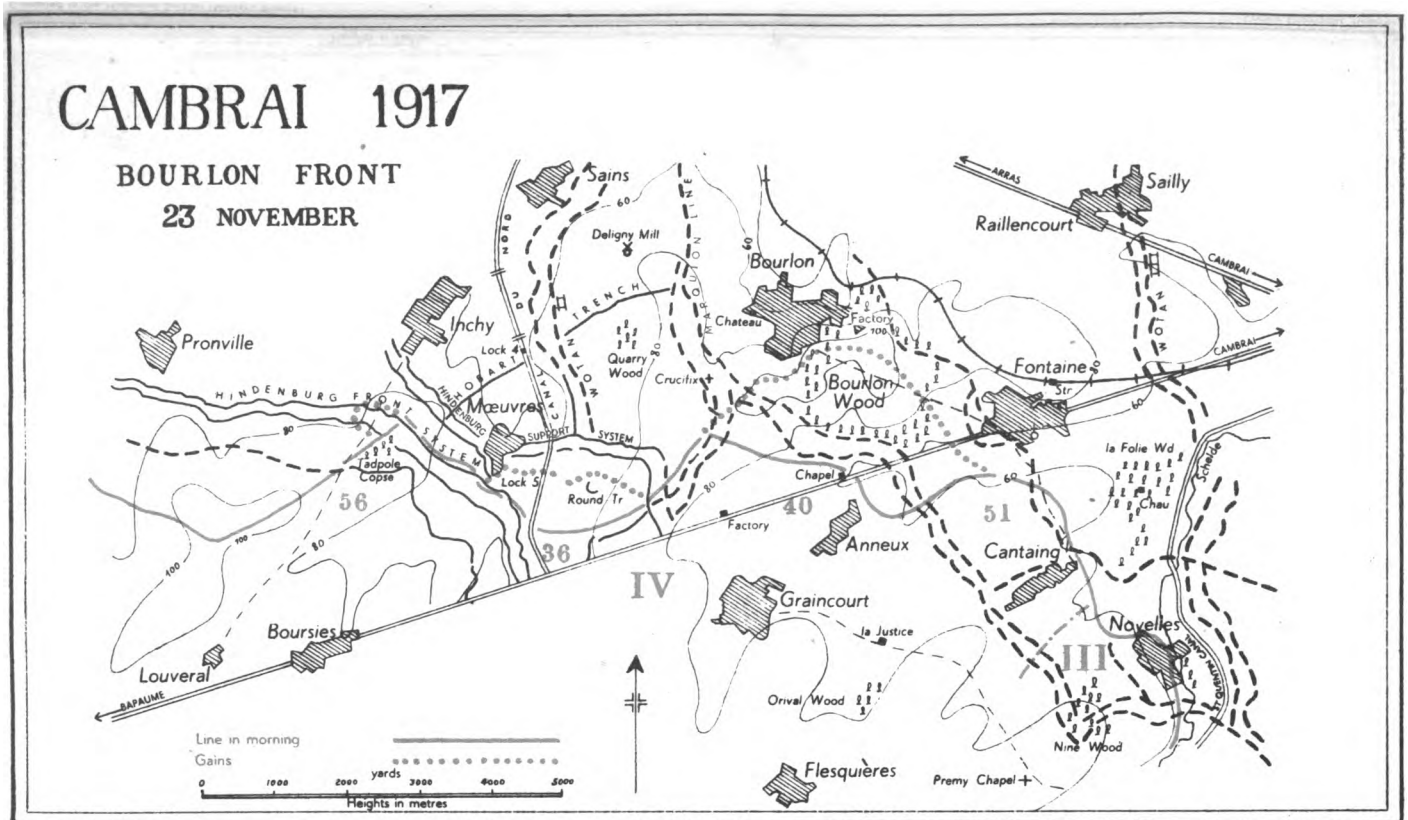


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved
Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

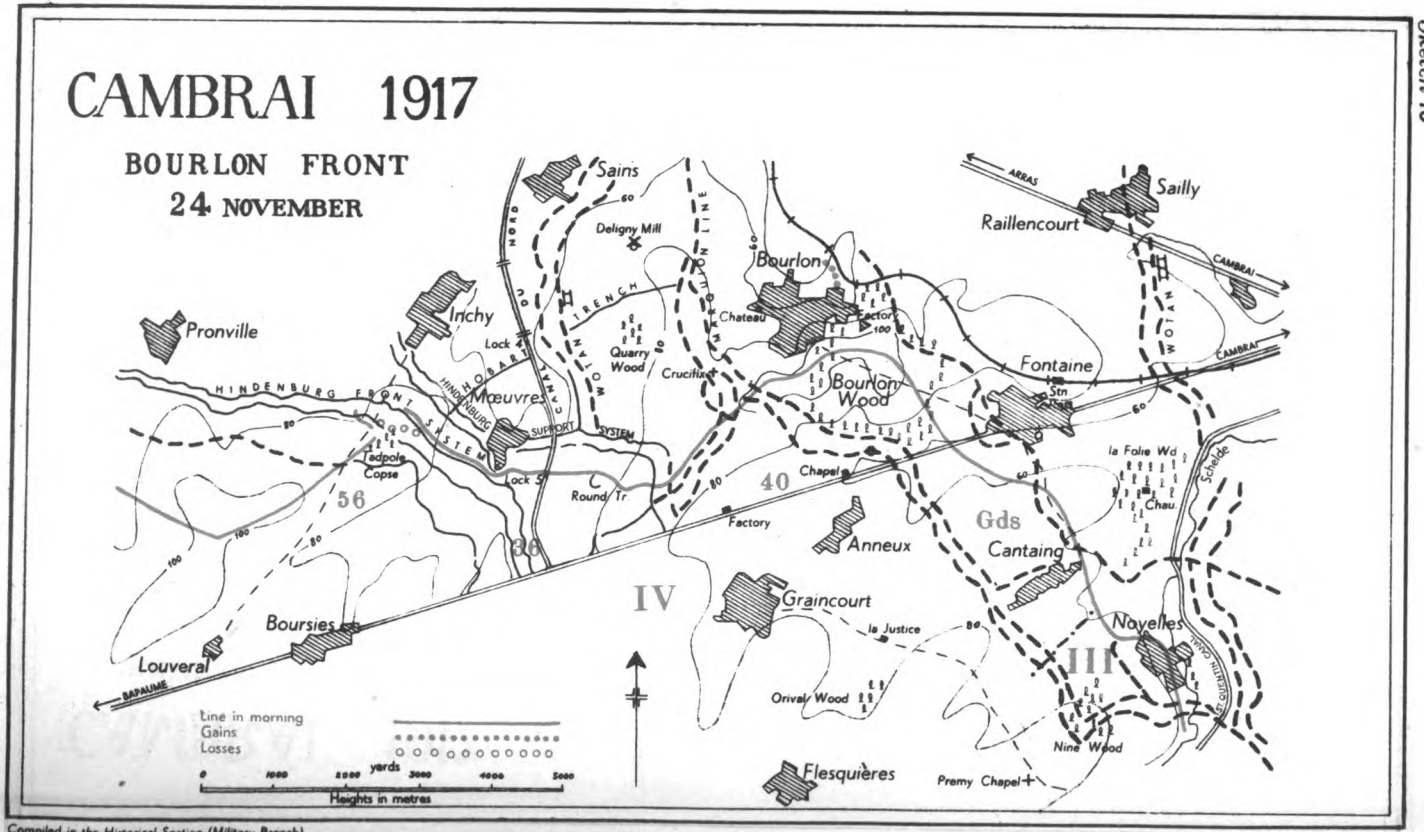


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Sketch 9

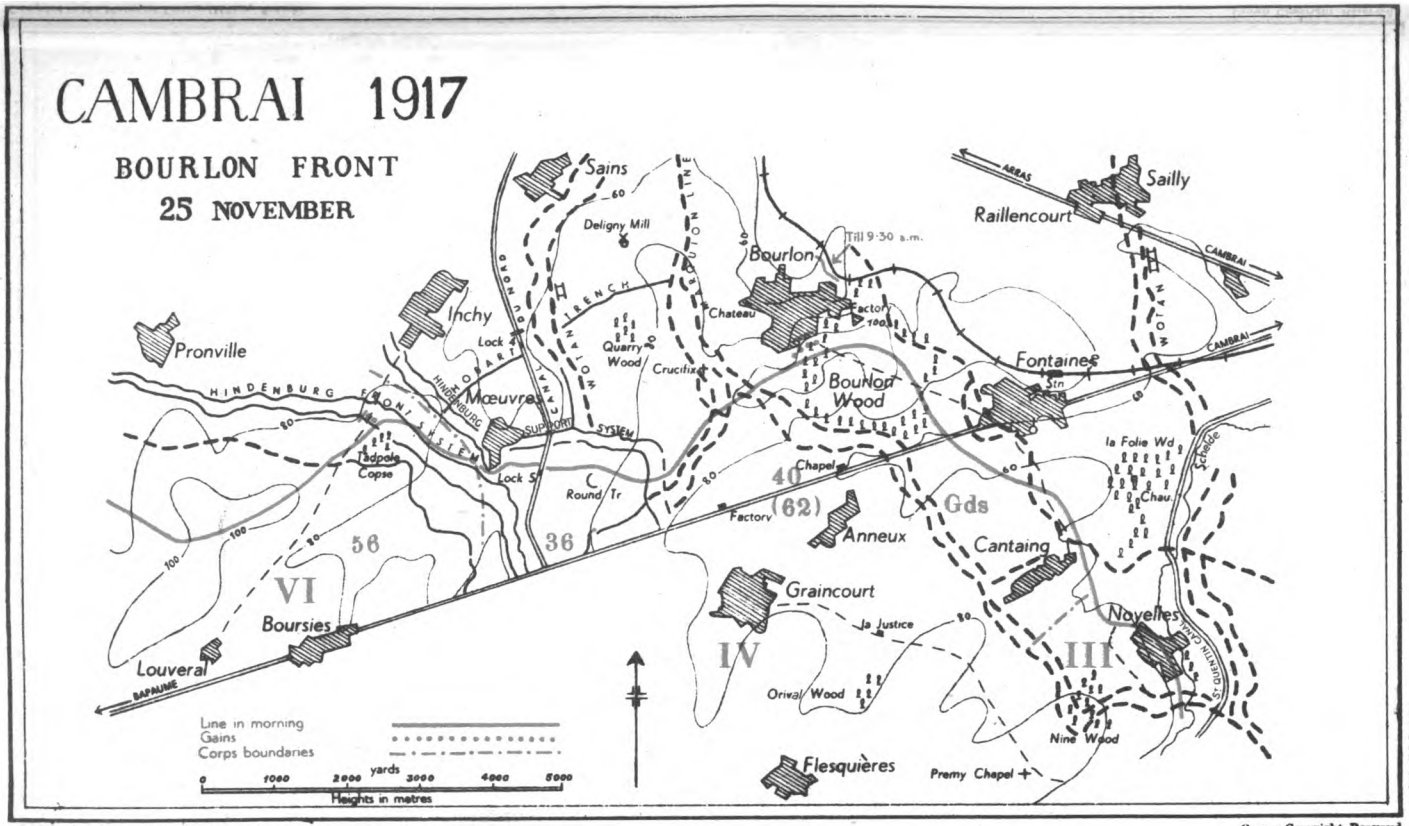
Digitized by Google



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google

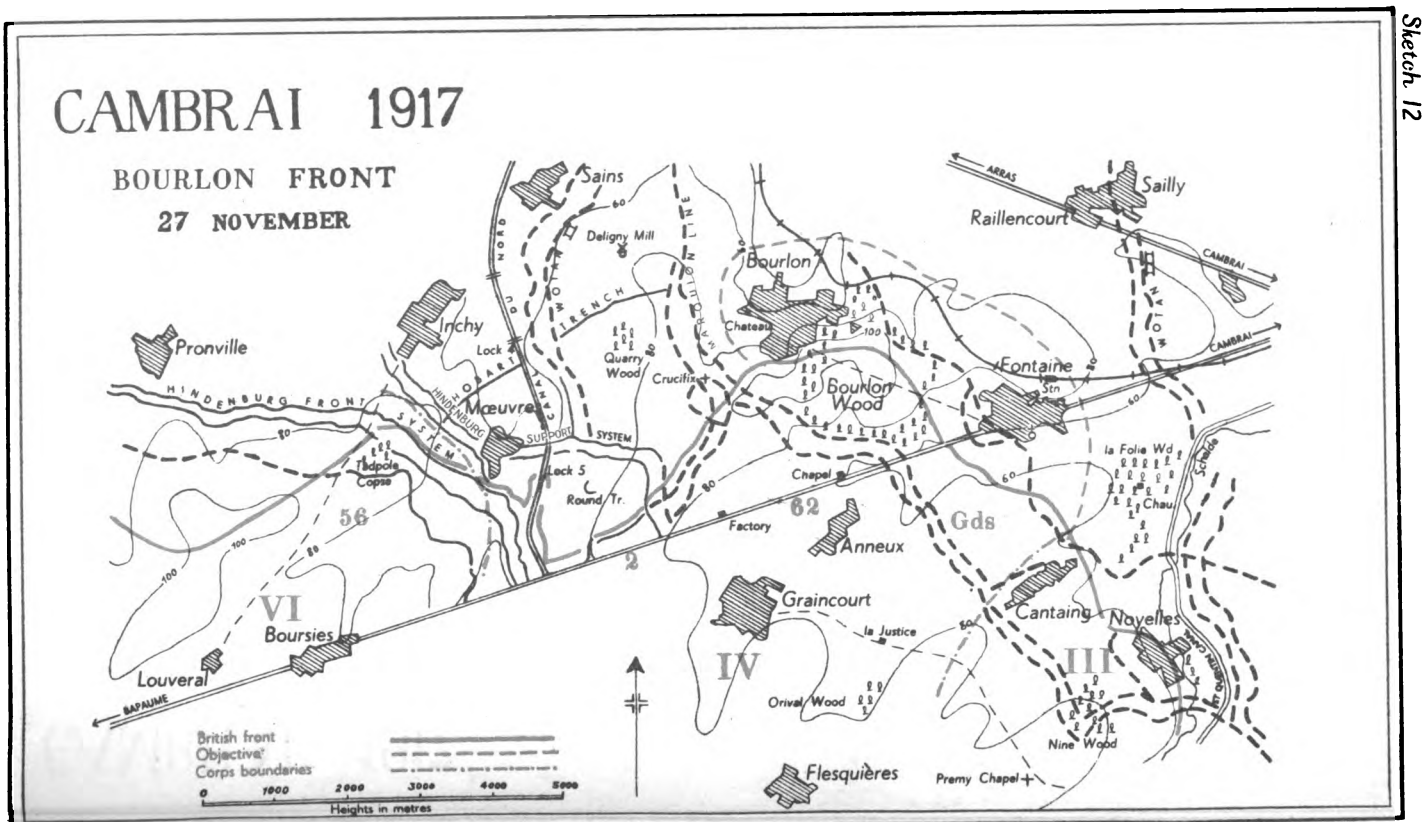


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Sketch 11

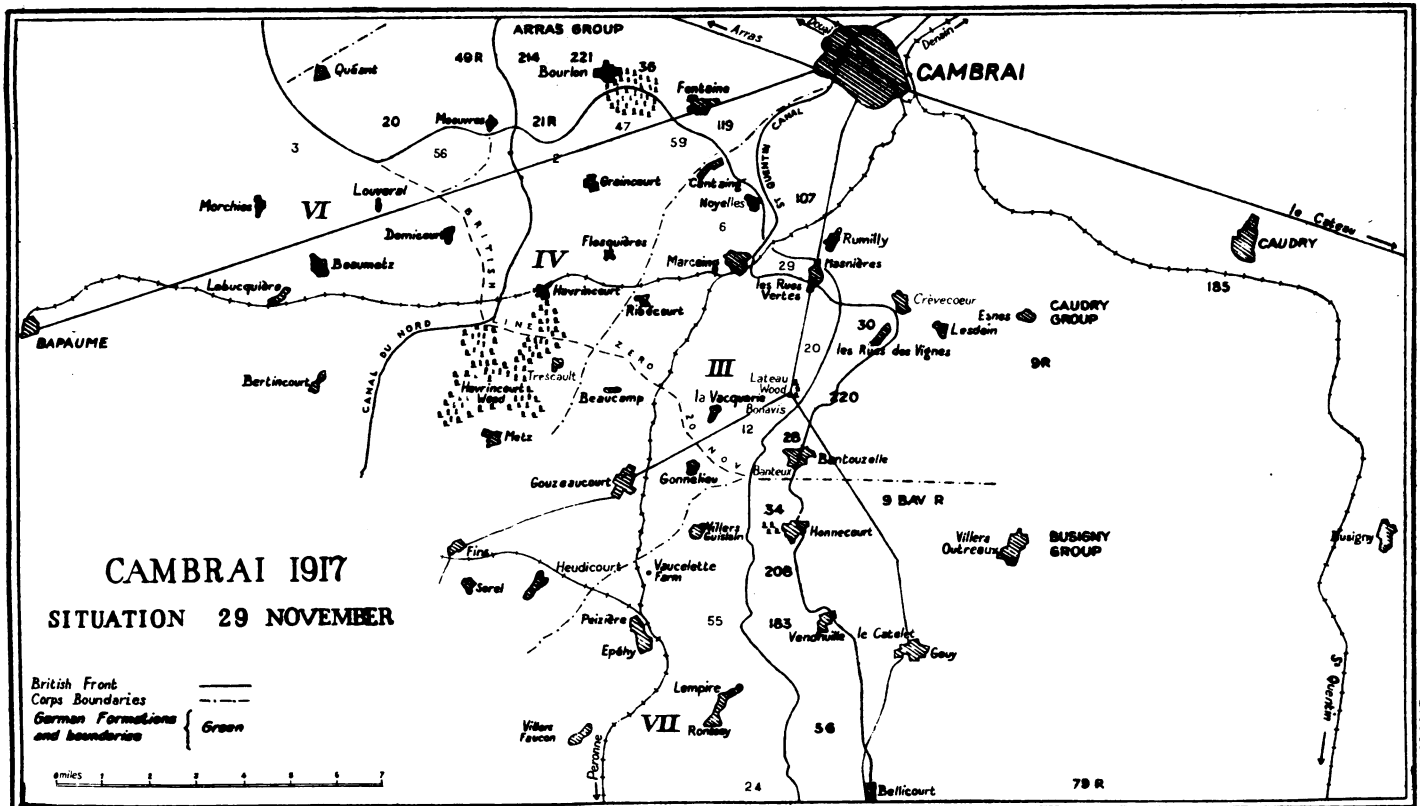
Digitized by Google



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google



Sketch 13

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google

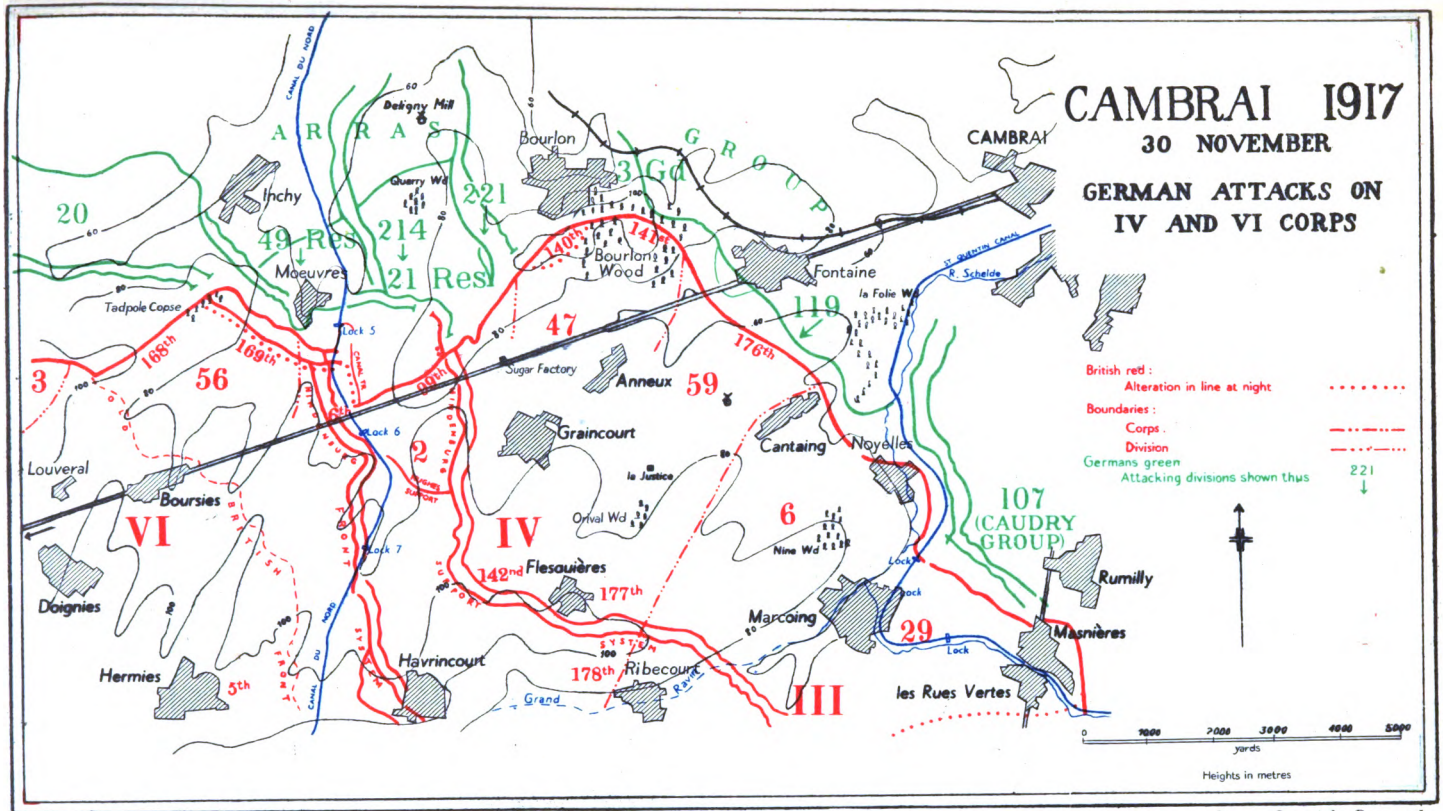
Sketch 14

CAMBRAI 1917
30 NOV.

GERMAN ATTACKS ON
VII and III CORPS

in pocket at end of volume

Digitized by Google



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

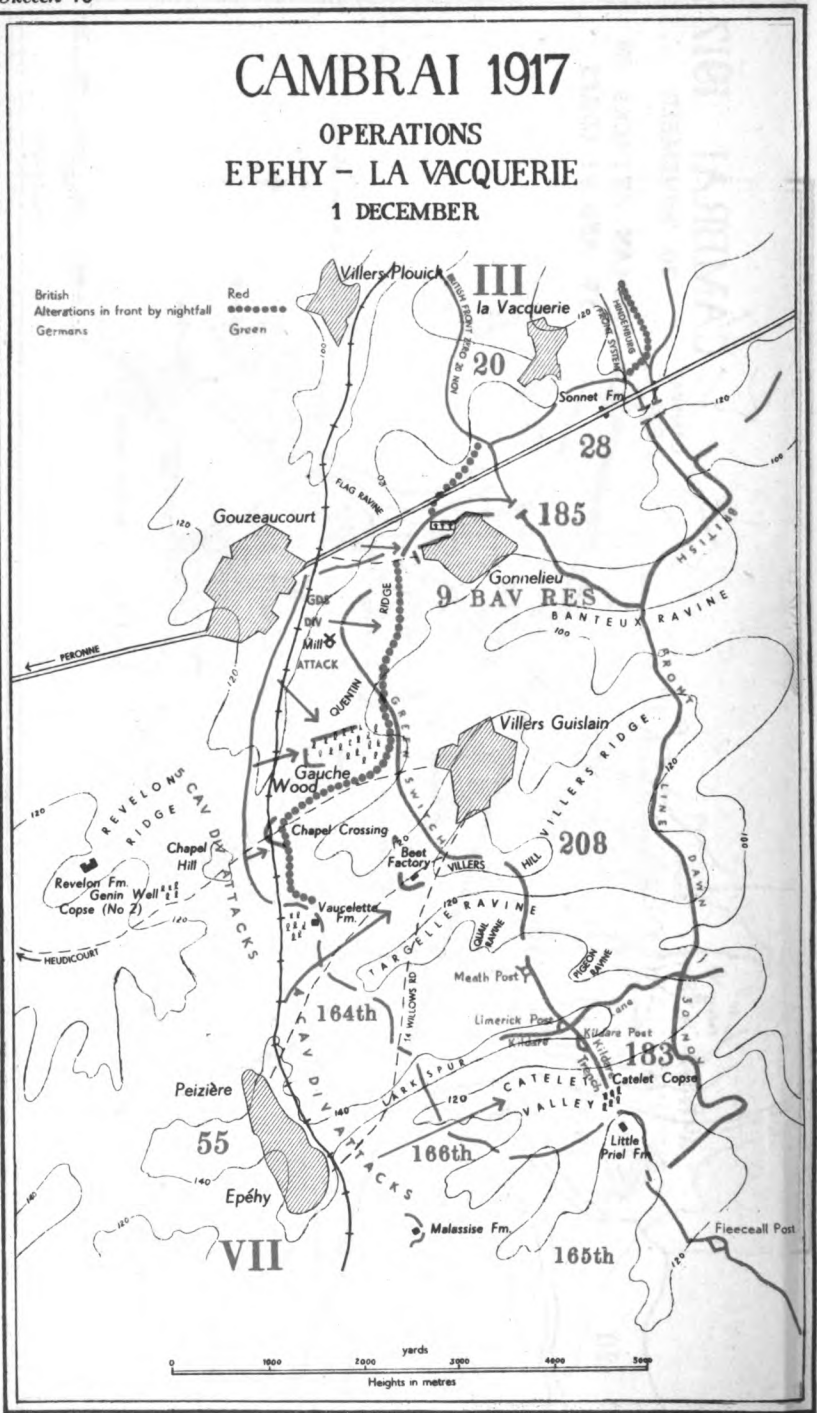
11404 Wt 17082

Crown Copyright Reserved

Sketch 15

Digitized by Google

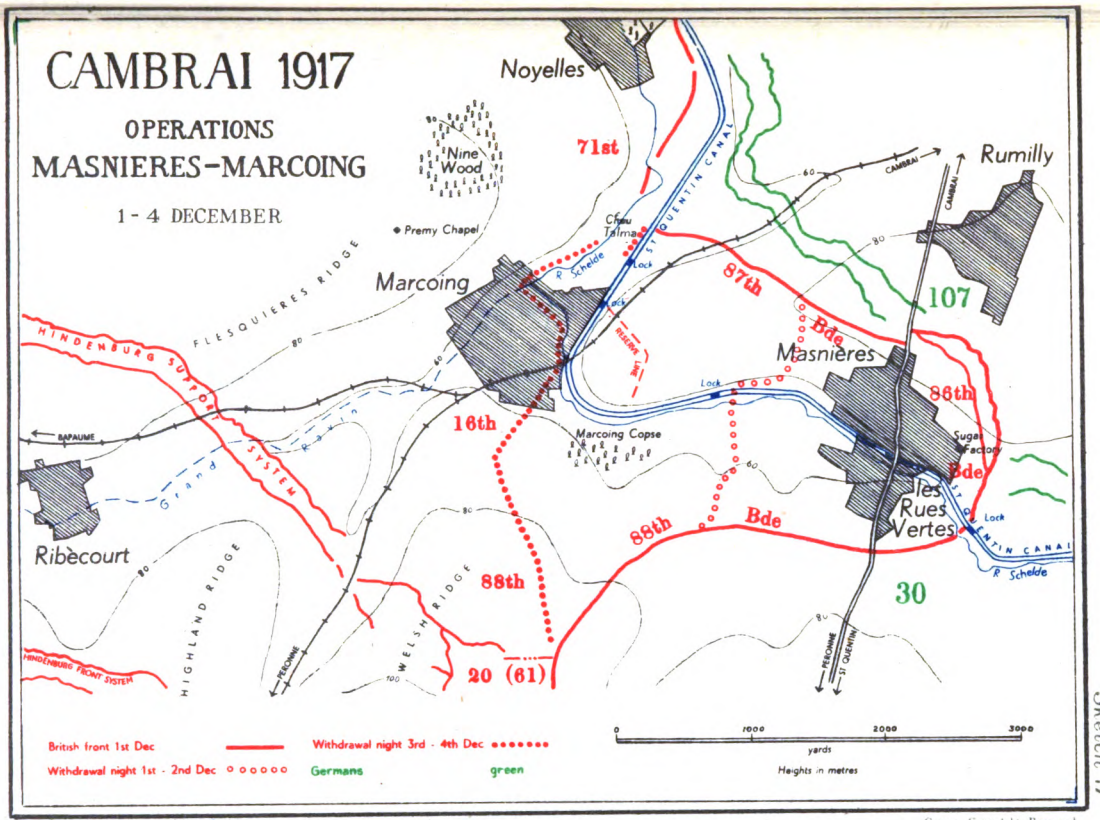
Sketch 16



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google



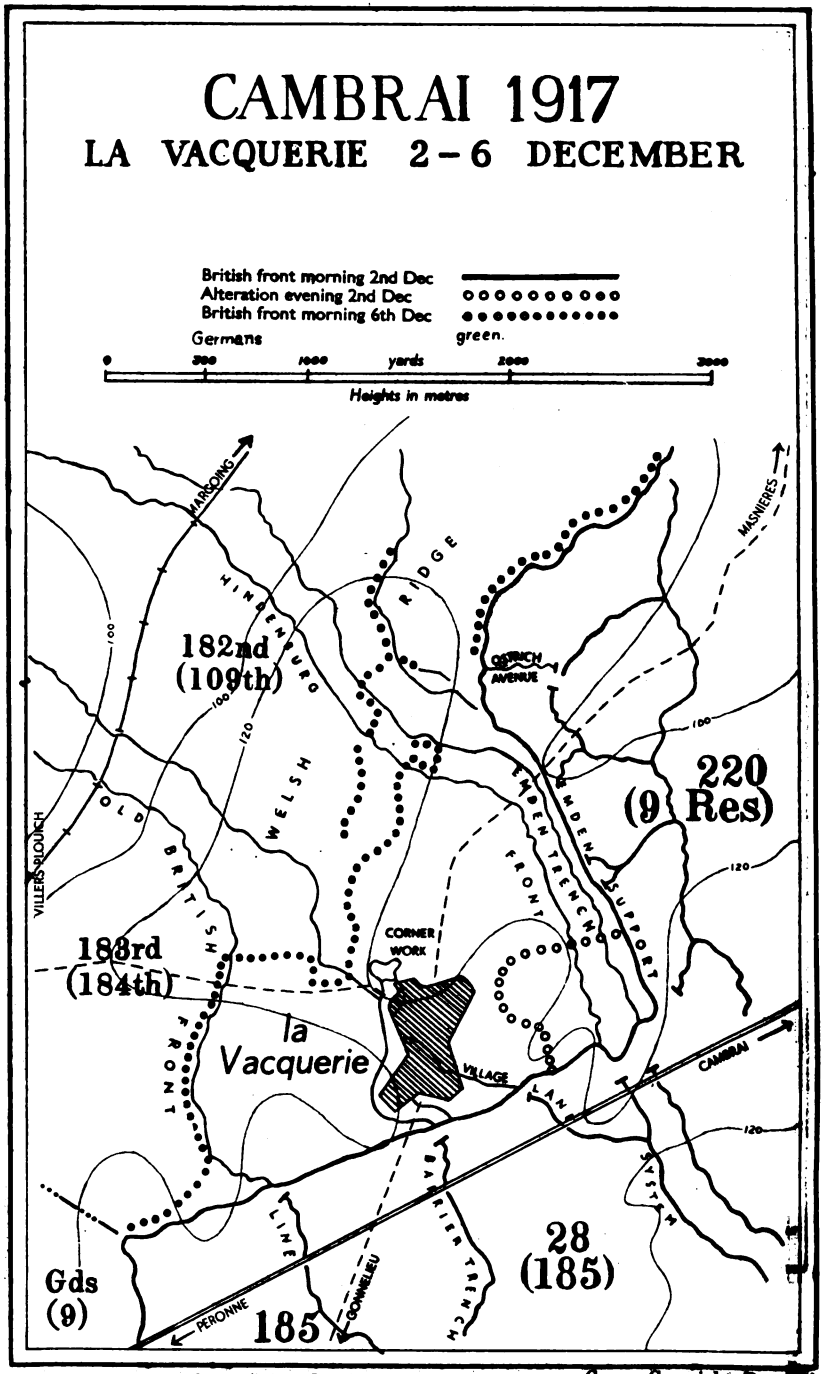
Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Sketch 17

Digitized by Google

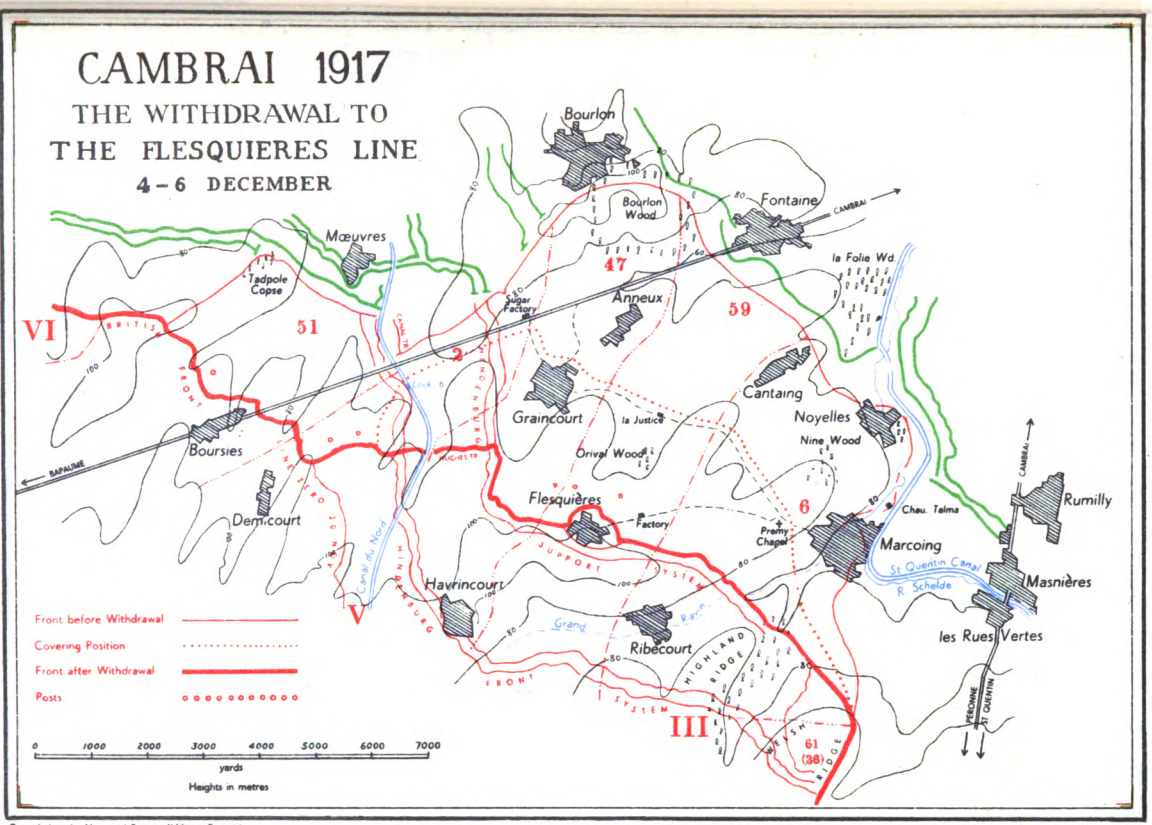
Sketch 18



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Digitized by Google



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Crown Copyright Reserved

Sketch 19

Digitized by Google

89094797883

b89094797883a

Sketch 20

Digitized by Google

3

e charged
overtime.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

This book may be kept
FOURTEEN DAYS
A fine of TWO CENTS will be charged for each day the book is kept overtime.

MR 3 '78			

Demco 291-B5

89094797883

b89094797883a

Sketch 20

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

This book may be kept
FOURTEEN DAYS
A fine of TWO CENTS will be charged for each day the book is kept overtime.

MR 3 '78			

Demco 291-B5

Google

B89094797883
B89094797883A

Digitized by Google